

LET TOMORROW COME



A. J. BARR



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Let Tomorrow Come

By

Albert J. Barr

Published 1929

LET TOMORROW COME

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BY

A. J. BARR



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JAILHOUSE

*Ah laid in de jailhouse
Face to de wall:
A sweet dirty woman
Was de cause of it all...*

I JAILHOUSE

HERE, by God, we are! Made it at last! We care and we don't. Most men who arrive here have in varying degree expected to arrive. All save the snowy have at least been aware of liability. We care, for that, whether those who are to meet us will accept us. The dog and the name. Tell no man he is bad and watch for goodness to shine out from him. Slam him in jail — he will battle for release. But winning, he will tell his affairs twice as black as they were. The lowliest doormat-thief will name himself a dino of surpassing ability, but give him half an opportunity.

And the women. Ho, ho, the women! Any two-bit tart will be a madame inside ten minutes, can you listen to her that long. She will tell you how none less than the mayor, and perhaps even the thickest pillar in the ministry,

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comes to her alone, prefers her among all the sisters.

“Cut out that God damned noise or I'll shove you in the hole. They won't hear you in there.” The jailer is so telling us who, precisely, runs the dump.

He comes over. “G'wan in there and louse up. And if you slop up the floor, then clean it up again. Remember.”

No matter where you may have come from, the flop house or the club, here you are suspected of harboring flesh-nipping chattel, and must slay them. If you are a

man. If you are a woman you are accorded the delicacy of a fumigation.

In we go. We strip in an odor of excrement from under the great rotary cage, two decks high, and shove our clothes into a tub. After soaping them we turn live steam into the tub through a hose. The tub jumps on the steel floor, making a rumbling clatter. If the heat did not kill him, the hardest louse would die of despair at the noise. A voice from far on the other side of the rotary: "Must 'a' been heavyweight

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skippin' bees you boys brung in here. You'll burn up your damn clothes if you don't stop."

In the tub the water whoops and bawls, tortured by the steam. A clinging, stinking vapor seeps through the place, enwrapping our chilling nakedness. Outside the blurred windows the light is wilting. The jailer comes in to us. "All right, you ain't killin' mules. Them's lice. Wring 'em out and come on over here and I'll show you where you cell. You can wrap a blanket on you and hang that stuff on the steam pipes. Eat your beans while it's dryin'. There ain't no coffee. Too late. And pipe down when nine o'clock comes, or it's the hole."

We follow, our flesh stuttering with chill. A lamp burns in the three-story-high ceiling, dimming the place with shadow rather than lighting it. Few cell lamps have been turned on. We have come upon the thinking time of most of the inmates. One does not think. "Hey, fellers," he shouts down at us from a high cell, "where the hell's your pants? Shame on you.

You're hangin' out a mile." He goes off into a great cackle at his joke.

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The jailer unbuttons a heavy door and we pass through. "Wanta cell together? All right, Jack, grab your stuff and go on over with Mosely. Yes you will."

Back at the end of the corridor in front of the five cells of the deck a mucous-colored face floats above the open toilet. Our beans are cooling on a shelf just inside the door through which we entered. Jack sullenly hauls his mattress and blankets out and away. We will not be too well set with Jack.

"All these birds is federals too," the jailer informs us at parting, "so you can have a lot of fun framin' with 'em about what you'll do to the screws at Leavenworth. But don't do nobody's time but your own in here. That way's best."

We take the pans to our cell. Someone calls to us from down the row: "If you find a bean with legs on it — that's a cockroach."

• • • • •

After the pans have been emptied a dark little cripple comes in casually and sits on one of the bunks. "Made you boil up, did he? Damned fool. No use. They grow bigger in here than

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anywhere you've been, even if it's a lot of places. Don't mind him. He ain't bad. Just noisy."

This is not the visitor's purpose. He knows we will learn the entomology of our home soon enough. One of his eyes is off center outward. Behind the eyes is a

neat, if limited, intelligence. He is about fifty. In his manner, no matter its seeming of ease, is a tense aloofness, the hiding of self behind the barrier of ineffaceable impressions that he may read us the better. He has had hard experience of hard men. His presence in the cell is not even an earnest of acceptance. We are birds who, his memories tell him, might make him as soon as any other a feather in our nest. Men who make the jailhouse know that each of their fellows lives on suspicion and deceit, hatred and offhand treachery, black craving and the easiest way to fulfillment.

“What’s the rap?” he asks, striving for unconcern. The rap is the man, and the cripple knows it. Some men love the theater; some not. Some beans; some not. Likes are signs. A dime’s worth of postage stamps, a million dollar consignment of hop or a nitwit tommy taken ten miles interstate for a bed — each rates you a

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bunk in the federal cell-block. The rap is the label that shows you big-time or a tanker.

We tell the cripple enough to let him fix us, and wait the returns. He smokes, and goes out. As we make up our bunks we hear him reporting, still with the easy manner. There are six besides himself and us in the ten-bunk tier. Jack was doing it alone until we arrived. After half an hour the cripple returns to invite us into a six-handed poker game. We accept. No aristocrats in this gang. The game is for nickels and dimes and close to the belly.

• • • • •

“Sundown — let tomorrow come.”... “Sundown — let tomorrow come.”... “Sundown — let tomorrow come.”... “Sundown — let tomorrow come.”... “Sundown — let tomorrow come.”... Over and over and over, again and again and again it goes, until finally we become conscious of it to the exclusion of all other sounds. The phrase is whined in a broken-reed voice that has an ignorant quality. The cripple is all insane nerves. As the lunatic iteration continues he fumbles his deals, misreads

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his cards, and finally throws them up. He leans back against the steel wall of the cell, slowly, terribly restrained, taut as a shriek with the effort at control. Gradually he steadies. The worst is past for the minute.

“Sundown — let tomorrow come.”... “Sundown — let tomorrow come.”... “Sundown — let tomorrow come.”...

The cripple says very slowly, very deliberately, “I think I’ll kill him tomorrow. I’ll make him a sundown. He’s got me. I can’t stand it any longer. I’m going nuts and I know it. I wasn’t ever like this before. He’s got four more months to do and I’ve got five. I’ll never make it. I’ll knock him off.”

He is too sincere. None of us dares urge against what he intends.

“Sundown — let tomorrow come.”... “Sundown — let tomorrow come.”... The cripple turns his head until he faces to a hair the direction of the torture. His eyes pass a shade dull. He is killing now, detailing in his

mind each feel and motion of the act. “Sundown — let tomorrow come.”... “Sundown— ”

Still maniac taut, the cripple gets off the bunk

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and goes to his cell. None of us follows. He would kill, in his condition, kill one, two, three, kill until he died. Not a word have we said to stay him.

• • • • •

Outside between the sidewalk and the jailhouse is a strip of black earth, moat to this our castle. We are islanded evils in an evil world. Under the shine of the sun the jailhouse roof is black. Under the stars, black. Under the black roof are black souls, each in a separate black cell of self. Some are black with habiliments of sin. Some are black only for that light never shone in them. Over the black floors, up the black stairs, scutter rats black from the sewers. Hands black in the night grip black bars. Faces of longing and silently screaming hate press against the restraining steel in the cell-blocks, seeking light.

• • • • •

Sounds drop out of the jailhouse night like shot men out of a battle line. Sleep, laggard, reluctant, unrestful, makes slow advances into the dens of the trapped, striking down one here, one there. Lamps die swift deaths in the windy

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stink. Men, women, scuttled, diseased, done and doomed to keep doing, wrap themselves in greasy blankets and sink into putrid negation for a space. The wind swings high as it passes over the roof.

• • • • •

“Sundown... let to... mor... row... come....”

II

WHITE MAN, BLACK MAN

HE is greeted as are all others who are brought in merely on charge, with long, delving stares, and silence. He must be the first to speak. He must tell us by word and act if he is right or wrong.

Short, and thick in the shoulders, he is. His hair is black, heavy and coarse, and he has the black, polished eyes of the gila. His clothes are cheap, and down the front of his smeared shirt dangles a stringy green tie.

“Come on, I’ll show you where to sleep,” the jailer, walking ahead, calls back to him. They go up to a small, two-man cell on the first bullpen tier. “In here. There’s two blankets on the other bunk. Make Bantas give you one.”

“Who is this heah Bantas?”

“The man that has the other bunk.”

The newcomer looks a question at the jailer,

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who turns away, indifferent. This prisoner, like all others, must make his own fight, obtain blankets in his own fashion. That way is easiest for the jailer.

“Who is Bantas, heah?” he asks when he comes down again to the bull-pen.

“Ah is,” Bantas answers, a hint proudly.

The stranger looks at Bantas, his mouth falling open loosely, in surprise. As the answer to his question seeps in his eyes contract, go brittle, hating. His arms

stiffen. He snaps around to the jailer, already asprawl and half asleep on a nearby bench.

“Look-a-heah, mistah, yu-all ain’t askin’ me to sleep with this heah niggah!”

“Sleep down here on something if you want to,” is the drawled answer.

“Lahk hell I will! That niggah’s goin’ out o’ theah, that’s all.”

He walks over to Bantas, who is lazing through a deck of cards at a small table, his thick, ebon hands almost hiding the deck. The black man flutters the cards with huge fingers and grins up at the latest arrival. He is a massive man and has the slow heaviness of a bear.

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“Look-a-heah, niggah,” The Southerner insists, “yu-all cain’t sleep in theah with me, now that’s all. Mout’s well git youah things outa theah.”

Bantas still grins at him. “Ah was heah fust, wite boy.” The grin widens. He opens his great mouth, lined with cerise crepe. His anger gathers slowly, and ebbs swiftly.

“Heah fi’st or last, yu-all’ll have to git out.”

“Go on, wite boy, Ahm goin’ stay wheah Ah is. Ah likes mah bed up theah.” He laughs deep inside himself at the turn of his retort.

The Southerner looks again at the jailer. The jailer’s belly rumbles with amusement. The Southerner is jumpy with rage, but does not feel certain ground beneath him. Another time he turns to Bantas. Now look-a-heah, yu black basta’d, yu-all—”

“Who you callin’ basta’d?” Bantas booms, coming to his feet. “Boy, you ain’t in no Mis’sippi now. You up No’t h. An’ you in de jailhouse.” The last is, for Bantas, an inspiration. His mild anger drifts away and he grins again. “In heah you do what de cap’n theah say. Cap’n say ‘Come heah,’ you comes. Cap’n say ‘Go

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’way,’ you goes. Cap’n he runs dis heah place.” He moves as if to sit down, too lazy to stand.

“Niggah,” says The Southerner heavily, “yuall’d be killed down theah fo’ saying that to a white man, even in a jail.” His face is streaked with green beneath his rubbly beard. His eyelids flicker rapidly and he runs the point of his tongue over his lips.

“Ah knows you is right,” Bantas answers, accenting with a rising inflection. “Da’s how come me to be up heah.”

The white man looks at him bitterly. Then he looks at the men standing about. None of those faces bears a comment, offers a solution. “No moah niggahs in heah yu-all kin sleep with?” He is inclined to reason now.

“Ah likes de bed Ah’s got, an’ Ah’m goin’ keep it. Ah sleeps nice up theah. You best take de udder’n, ’cause we all full up heah.”

“Yu-all kin go to hell! Ah don’t sleep with no niggah, not if Ah sleep standin’ up.”

“All right, wite boy, what you fussin’ ’bout? You fidgety as a ha’nt. Ah ain’t goin’ cry ef you don’ sleep up theah. Ah’m goin’ sleep jus’-a-same.”

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Bantas sits down again. The Southerner once more scans the faces in the ring about him. They tell him nothing. He turns to the black man. "Come on, now, are yu-all goin' to git out? If yu-all don't Ah'll..."

"You'll what?" Bantas asks, rising again.

"Why, you di'ty black basta'd, Ah'll... He lunges at Bantas and swings a fist inexpertly. Bantas folds a hand and shoves it forward. The white man is forced back, almost off his feet. Someone in the ring snickers.

"Mah bones ain't so old no little frimpet lahk you goin' do nothin' to me, boy. Go on away now." He sits again. The Southerner goes to a bench. He spends the remainder of the exercise period glowering at the black man.

.

Lockup is called. The Southerner does not approach the jailer again, but sits and looks pleadingly at him. When most of us have left the pen he asks, "Kin Ah have a blanket, mistah?"

"Bantas'll give you one if you ask him."

"Ah won't ask a niggah for nothin'."

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"Suit yourself. Sleep on the bench there. Rats'll get you on the floor."

After the lights go and quiet falls, Bantas calls down, amused, "How you sleepin' down theah, wite boy?"

"Ah wish Ah had mah knife, Ah'd show yu-all how Ah'm sleepin'."

"Good night, wite boy. Sho nice up heah." Bantas laughs, drowsily, and says no more.

III THE TUNNEL

FROM the jail to the courthouse runs the tunnel. It is no longer used, save by the rats and whatever ghosts have failed to die in it. At the courthouse end, we are told, it is closed with a steel door painted to match the wall of the chamber into which it once opened. Here at our end it is closed with a steel grille. Light penetrates only a few feet beyond the grille on the brightest day.

Along the walls inside the light shades imperceptibly into blackness. Who could mark the dividing line could determine between right and wrong.

If we stand close to the grille we can see where the slimy sweat has chewed a stone from the wall. Decay that eats stone — what will it not do to a man? All the stones are putrid green. Far back in the darkness we can hear the stifled trickle of

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water, complaining like a soul that has not found rest. Out through the grille belches a stream of chill fetor, giving to all the jail, to our clothes and our flesh and the food we eat, an odor of dank rot.

A rat shrieks distantly and splashes along the floor of the tunnel. It is joined by another and a slashing battle ensues for two minutes.

Something about the jet passage draws us. At any time men are in the bull-pen, some will be found

leaning against the grille or the wall near it, peering — for what? Men have gone through that hole quick with hope and have come back with ropes around their necks. That ring in the ceiling — lives have been snatched through it between two breaths. That is of the past also. Wired lightning does the job now. It is less messy, more efficient, leaves the subject more presentable to the old folks.

• • • • •

Two days ago Gordon began on a story about May. She seems to have become a kind of obsession with him, or her story does. A fight in a second-deck cell broke into the tale before he

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had ten words said. “Tell us about it, Gordon,” Callahan says to him in banter as he approaches the group about the grille. Cal does not believe there is much to the story and has said he does not understand why Gordon prates so of the May woman.

“Come on over an’ sit down an’ I will,” Gordon answers, in a tone that burgeons with stored surprise. “This dame was the real thing, I’m tellin’ you. I’d give a million to have some frail love me the way she hated Bates.”

We cross to the little table at which Bantas likes to sit and show his card tricks for the youngsters in the place.

“Bates was a deputy to Williams, sheriff here about twenty years ago. He sat on the job a long time, that man Williams. Had a hell of a drag, an’ I guess wasn’t so bad.

“Well, May... You probably heard she used to be tight hole in the redlight here. And some doll, too — big, with red hair an’ big white teeth. And hot. Most of the lead gals are cold, exceptin’ for somebody special.”

“How do you think you know her so well?”

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Cal interrupts. “You wasn’t more than a kid then, just about out of the cradle.”

“I’m a little bit older’n that, Cal. And what I didn’t find out for myself I heard. But if you don’t want me to tell you about her, why to hell with you.” He is aggrieved, and makes as if to rise.

“Oh, hell, go on and shoot it. Don’t be so damned touchy.”

“I don’t know about bein’ touchy. You sit there and try to make a man out a liar before he opens his trap.”

This is taking the others of us too far from the subject. We pull Gordon back.

“Well, Bates, the dep, he worked night an’ day tryin’ to make May. He was flamin’ like the hinges of hell after that mamma. But he didn’t get nowhere. She didn’t like him because he was the law an’ because he was Bates. He was some kind of a one-barreled gambler before he was made dep, an’ had a lousy name for the stuff he threw among the gals. He used to pick ’em up an’ throw ’em away like old razor blades.

“So what did he do? He framed some kind

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of a rap on May. Maybe he did have a little somethin’ on her, but it wasn’t much. He stood ace high with

Williams. Williams knew what he was after, an' between the two of 'em they began to make it look bad for May. She made bail, but the rap stuck, an' finally she was tried an' set for a bit."

Bantas heaves up to the table, hoping we will leave the spread to him and his cards. But he does not ask us for it, and when he absorbs our intention of staying he goes off in search of some other flat surface.

"Well, Bates got it fixed so it was him that took May over to the old man for the bad news. The tunnel was the way all of 'em went in an' out, them days. It was just as stinkin' then as it is now, too, with the rats an' all the rest of it.

"On the way back I guess the dep began tellin' May how sorry he was for her an' what he'd do if she came clean. I ain't pretendin' I know all about that part, but it seems like the way the thing was goin' along. Him an' May stood in the tunnel there a long time, arguin', an' finally she told him it was all right.

"She was foxy, that sister. She never meant it

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was all right. She wanted to pay this heel for what he done to her. And boy, she did! When she had him all nice an' cozy in that place, what did she do? Know what she done? She reached up an' hung all them big white teeth right in his gizzard an' kept 'em hanging there 'til he stopped jumpin'.

"Can you figure any one hatin' any one like that? That's what I mean when I say I'd like some good-lookin' to love me like May hated Bates. Boy!

“She couldn’t get out nowhere, so she went back to the old man an’ told him all about it. Then there was a real trial, an’ she ended up in stir with the keys thrown away. She only had sixty days in this dump the first rap. I guess she’s still up there. Somebody ought to tell her some day they closed up the old chute since she went wild in it.”

• • • • •

The jailer ambles past. Gordon calls to him, “Say, skipper, is May still in stir — the dame that bumped Bates?”

“Yes,” he stops to tell us. “And she’s pretty old now. A fellow was just in here could tell

23

you all about her. Did you notice that fellow that’s the Swede’s lawyer? Well, that’s her kid. But he can’t do anything for her. And she don’t want anything done for her anyway.”

24

IV MAN AND WOMAN

*We look to the end of the tale, that
there shall be a marriage feast, and find
only black marigolds and a silence.*

HEL... lo, Jo... sie.”
“Hel... lo, Su... sie.”

They are calling across the pen above our heads, she from the women’s ward, he from his wall cell, dragging the syllables for comedy effect. A strange love this pair displays. They seem to believe we are unaware of the happenings on the airy plane of their romance. We wonder if they live their love-life in the open when they are outside, as they live it in here. They shout intimacies at each other as if they were calling from the treetops in a secret forest place.

“How did you sleep, old boy?”

“Great, and why not?”

25

“How long will you be in here, honey? Long?”

“Quit comicking, sweetie,” Joe calls back. His voice has a taint of sullenness. “Did the rats bite your toes?” We feel the casualness of the question. “They did not, Josie, but they scare me. And say, that night screw’s a pretty fly boy, Josie. Better watch him or he’ll steal your mamma.” She laughs.

Joe finds the matter more serious. "I'll break his neck," he declares darkly.

"Pull down your shirt, Josie — you're not bad. Forget it."

Bantas, stripped to a pair of stagged overalls, swishes his clothes in the tub and grins. "Come, heah, Goldie, an' he'p de black man wrench his dress-ups. Le's us putend dis heah de night gua'd an' you is Joe an' Ah's Susie." He laughs deeply, lazily. "Twis' 'is neck, Goldie, twis'!" They struggle with the clothes. "How'd you lahk me fo' you Susie, Goldie?" He roars and loses his grip on the clothes. Merriment squeezes tears from his wallowing eyes.

As we proceed with our morning of laundering we listen to the lovers. Bantas spreads his

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things hurriedly on a radiator, swabs his waggish head under a tap, and goes off dripping and spluttering to a table. He can play with his cards until the jailer learns he has finished and locks him up until exercise.

"Joe," Susie calls, "what did that mouthpiece say about the bail?"

"He said he'd have it for one or both of us tomorrow. If it's one, that's you. If it's both, that's us, Sue. That man is all right. Earl had him — you know."

Sue considers the plan, then calls, "Listen, Joe, you're off your crock on that. If he makes it for only one of us, you go on out, and see Rose. She won't know I'm in, and you know why that is, too. She'll fix me up as soon as you crack. You know I can't go to see her, and all the others are in K. C."

Joe makes no reply. She calls again, "All right, Joe?"

"I don't know — maybe. I said maybe."

"Don't go haywire, Joe. Use your hatrack." Her tone lowers skittishly. "Joe — love mamma?"

"Unh-hunh. But don't tell everybody your business."

27

"Lots?"

"And more too."

"How much?"

Goldie, alert to all occasions for joking, begins to sing, using the Negroid manner:

*Johnnie an' Frankie was love's;
Oh mah God how dey could love;
Say dey'd be true to each tedder,
True as de sta's above—*

*He was huh man,
But 'e done huh wrong.*

Joe is resentful immediately, and barks down, "What's wrong, small-time, jealous?"

Goldie laughs and continues, omitting long passages. He will be sent to his cell soon:

*Roll me ovah easy,
Roll me ovah slow,
Roll me on mah lef' side;
Bullet hu't me so—
Ah was huh man,
But Ah done huh wrong...*

• • • • •

28

As soon as we are turned out for exercise Joe trots around the gallery to the door of the women's ward to talk with Sue. Inside are four women — a Negress, Sue, a time-bitten woman we have named Dirty-Skirt, and a baggy prostitute of about thirty. Dirty-Skirt is the most dismal specimen of the four. She has lived all of her forty or more years undecided whether to scrub floors or sell joy, and therefore is unsuccessful at both.

Excepting for the toilet compartment, cut off by a steel partition that goes halfway to the ceiling, the ward is a single large room with bunks ranged around three walls. Two barred windows overlook the street in front of the jailhouse. The door from the gallery is a steel lattice in a steel frame.

Joe hooks fingers through the small square holes from his side, Sue from hers. We watch them. They try to kiss, and fail.

"You don't want her very bad or you'd bust down the door," someone jeers at Joe from the bull-pen below.

Joe whips around, his face leaden with anger. "I can kick the head off the man that said that,"

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he shouts. He moves as if to come down the stairs.

Someone else, standing in a group, calls, "Kick down the door and get your woman, you big bum!"

Sensing that the brave ones below will not discover themselves to him, Joe turns back to the girl. He looks around at intervals to scan the bobbing heads. After a time he comes down.

"Now if any of you wants to say something wise, say it here," he challenges in a loud voice from the foot of the stairs. "I'll take on any one of you that thinks he's bad enough to get away with any cracks about the girl."

Mordwal has been singing. He stops to hear the challenge, then resumes:

*Ain't got no money but I will have some,
My honey;
Ain't got no money but I will have some,
'When the pay-car comes around,
My honey...*

Joe still cons us, waiting. Nothing happens. He leaves the stairs and strolls about. Bantas watches him, amused, then walks over and, planting

30

himself squarely in front of Joe, says without preliminary, "Ah'll play you some cooncan."

Joe looks at him and lowers, looks around the pen at all of us and our varied activity, then accepts. The air of the pen slackens.

Joe discovers Bantas has only small change and soon loses interest in the play. We start a stud game and he drops in, wanted but uninvited. He looks like money, and we need it. After a few hands someone asks, "How's the girl, Joe?"

"She's all right."

"Who's goin' out, you or her?"

"I am. Then she is. First king bets."

"Got a good lawyer?"

"Hey, turn that hand down if you ain't goin' to play it. Play poker, for Christ's sake."

"Too good — he costs too much. You win all the money and the deal, brother. But she's worth it. See that rock on her finger? Take a look at it and tickle your eyes. We're buying the orange blossoms as soon as we get out of here."

"What's the ticket say?"

31

"Nothing much. It's a bum rap. Dealer antes, don't forget."

"Dealer's got a week, don't you forget."

• • • • •

Sue is still with us. Joe has been gone a month. At exercise some of us always go up on the gallery to talk with the girl through the slats. Today Dirty-Skirt is sprawled asleep on a bunk. The Negress is chewing toenails with a pair of dull scissors, humming. The prostitute is gone.

“What about it, Susie — when’s that bum showin’ up with the bond?”

Her blonde face dulls and slight pain shows in her eyes. “I don’t think he will, now.” She is pretty in a short, slightly too-wide fashion.

“You know ve’y well he won’t, honey,” the Negress says. “Men ain’t no good for nothin’. Ain’t one of them boys right out there wouldn’t give you the go-by, give ’em a chance.”

Sue is indifferent to the preachment. “I don’t want him to come back, now. He’s no good.” The ring glittering on her finger catches her glance, and she smiles a shapeless smile. “I suppose this is phoney too.”

• • • • •

32

“What did they give you, Sue?” we ask when first we see her after she is brought back from court.

“Six months. I wish I had that dirty scum here now to lay him out. He’d hook his mother, that guy!”

We note the ring is gone. “Where’s the ice?”

She pulls a hand from a coat pocket and displays a small roll of bills. “Right here. The mouthpiece took it to hock for me. At least it was all right.”

33

V SING-SONG

ROUND and 'round the pen we go, single file,
swinging arms and legs to their last limits. We
sing and tramp, and the fat, lazy jailer lies asprawl on
his bench, nor tries to stay us. The song has a virile
rhythm...

*Oh, what a lot of devils,
The like you never saw:
Hoboes, thieves and highwaymen,
All breakers of the law—*

*They sang a song the whole night long,
Their curses fell like hail:
I blessed the day they took me away
From the Barstow County jail.*

Oh, such a set of villains...

One by one the prisoners are caught up from the
benches by the swing of it, and fall in, anywhere.

34

“Give ’er hell, men, give ’er hell,” the lead man
calls, straining to fling his arms and legs yet farther
forward and back.

Down from one of the small cages just under the
ceiling The Nut calls: “Sing-song, sing-song. They

took her, they took her, they took her. I know them. Sing-song, sing-song...”

He leaps, clatters, squeals, grunts, laughs, beats his fists together, rasps the bars with a cup. We swing to another song:

*We hear her mighty rumble,
We hear her whistle's call,
As we ride the rods and brake-beams
Of the Wabash Cannon Ball.*

*She dashes down the hillside
And on along the stream...*

“Sing-song, sing-song,” cries The Nut. “They march, march, march. The soldiers march away. She won’t come back, I know she won’t. The last thing was her red hair. She...” He pounds the iron bed with a pan, keeping erratic time with the throw of our feet.

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“Bust it up, old-timer,” someone shouts. “Tear it apart.”

*As we ride the rods and brake-beams
Of the Wabash Cannon Ball...*

The Nut vents a thin shriek and the jailer twists his gaze upward without altering the position of his vast carcass. He laughs noiselessly, bouncing his belly.

“March, march, march away, soldiers. Singsong. They took her.” A skinny, pumpkincolored bare arm

slides out between the bars, swinging a cup as a bell is swung. “March, march, march. Sing-song, sing-song. They took her away from me....”

The heat in the pen is heavy, but we force our bodies on around the circle. We may tire ourselves sufficiently to induce sleep. We shall go back to our cells soon. We try another one, quickening it to comport with the beat of our blood:

*Old God's whiskers have a color all their own,
Old God's whiskers have a color all their
own...*

36

“‘Round we go, men; give ’er guts,” urges the lead. We strain to speed the last few circuits. At the end we are almost trotting.

“Sing-song, sing-song.” The Nut’s voice has risen to a high pitch. He clatters on.

The jailer gets off his bench to order us in. As we break file a high, prolonged scream cuts across the top of the pen. It is followed by a thump and a gurgling sound.

“In you go, all of you,” the jailer snaps, terse beyond his wont. His face has lost color. We are not as noisy as usual as we go to our cells.

• • • • •

An hour later we crowd to the bars and lattices to see The Nut carried out. A towel is over his face.

37

VI RED MIKE

R EPORTERS all over the state have built myths about Red Mike Brady for a month. We are pleased to have him with us for a few days. We have read in the morning papers that he will be brought in this afternoon and will go to stir with the next group.

Later in the day he arrives, limping in an Oregon boot. We thought he would be younger. His clump of bristly red hair is thick with gray. He is built like an epic. His post of a neck is seamed with work and dissipation and his face is dented with battle. But his gray eyes look as if they never could have been more keen. Callahan, Ford and the rest of us on the upper deck learn he is to be put in with us, though he is not a federal.

After lockup we help him prepare a bed. He has not been subjected to the exhaustive scrutiny

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we give others. He has his bit all tucked away, will be here only for a stopover, and therefore is harmless to us. He seems grateful, though his interest in our home is small. All go to his cell to make acquaintance after Cal and two others of us have helped him settle. He is from "outside." Soon we arrive at the inescapable. Cal asks, "How about those stories in the papers, Red?"

"Them's the nuts," is his answer. His voice is deep and has the furriness that denotes a throat burnt with liquor.

“Tell us how you tumbled, Red, will you? We all tumbled, too,” one urges him. The banality of the qualifier he ignores.

“Aw, t’hell with it,” Red scoffs, tossing his head. “I shoved a guy across, that’s all.”

“Well, tell us about it anyway. Blackie, there, set a guy over, too. At least he says he did.” Blackie looks pleased.

“All right. But hell, there ain’t nothin’. Well— ”

“Go ahead, Red, spiel.”

• • • • •

“Well, me an’ a plug — K. Y.; I don’t know ’is

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real handle — well, me an’ him an’ a gunsel dangles into this burgh over here a little ways one mornin’. We’re in the belly of a drag, an’ it’s colder’n hell. We’re headin’ for Noo Orlins. Well, we unload, an’ I send K. Y. an’ the gunsel to the cans an’ I make for the stem to collect some garbage.

“I start ding-dongin’ an’ collect a few dimes. I nearly go to the mat with one cherry picker. He cracks som’pin’ about bums I don’t like. I’m rummy from a lot o’ mule I drank farther up the line an’ feel mean. I go in a dump an’ put the B on the boss. He says nothin’ doin’, so I try to glom a brace o’ spuds. He makes me doin’ it an’ I heave ’em at ’im an’ duck.

“Well, so I make another parlor an’ buy what I can, an’ then go on up the avenue to make a gut plunge on butch. I meet a happy lookin’ dingbat an’ start to tell him the news, but I get a rumble from Dick. He’s an old gink with funny cheaters an’ a Dinwiddie.”

Red lights the stub of a cigarette that hangs to his lower lip. He seems inclined to stop. "Yeah?" Blackie prompts.

"Well, I try to lam for the sticks, but he gloms

40

me. His side kicker comes along, a sporty bird that looks bad. They ask me what I'm doin' an' I ask 'em will the cows go dry if they don't find out. The young one gets hot an' starts to drag me down to the can.

"I'm packin' a heater, see, an' I don't wanta stand no frisk. An' I don't wanta put in no time in that can, neither. These snowballs out here's too big for me. Well, I'm tryna figure how can I bust their play an' I start an argument, see. The sporty clown don't like this an' starts usin' names I don't like a damn bit. I look at 'im a minute an' then make a pass at 'im."

Red Mike's eyes clench and his mouth sucks in to a line straight across. He has the lean head and close ears of the fighter. He rolls another cigarette and lights it.

"He tries to unlimber his rod, but I beat 'im to the wheel. I don't know yet whether I blasted on purpose or if I was just rummier from that whiteline than I thought I was. Anyhow I don't mean to set this guy over. Just scare 'im. Well, he drops. The one with the cheaters lets his pan fall open so far you could shove an apple in it. He gives me one look an' hauls his caboose back

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up to the stem. I take it on the lam, not waitin' to hook with K. Y. an' the brat.

"I go by hand all day an' make a blind along about dark. That old stiff musta run to the wires, 'cause they flag this baby down the line a ways an' take me off. I'm sleepin' on the hocks in that blind, an' I'm a mark for the mob that's around.

"They sap me up some. See here." He fingers a scar in front of his left ear. It is pink and white, new. "An' that's all there is to it."

"What did they give you — the works, didn't they?" Ford asks. "And give me that snipe," he appends.

Red hands it over. "Yeah. The papers got that much straight. Yeah. Both barrels. The book. 'From now on,' like K. Y. useta say. K. Y.'s all right. He sends me in some Durham an' a few clackers he raised somewhere just before I came over here. The jack was in a letter with no name, but I know it's from him. He's fine and dandy, that plug."

• • • • •

Silence blooms in the cramped cell. Blackie avoids all eyes, and Cal is in the nether pit of

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rumination. Red sits motionless, bemused, for a time, and then again takes out tobacco and papers and slowly twists a smoke. He lights it, drawing the solace deep into his lungs. His head falls back against the steel wall.

"Naw, I ain't goina try no break. What the hell!"

A thin beam of sunlight cuts obliquely through the cell, dashing his left temple and the tip of his nose with saffron, making the scar a cleft of beauty. Smoke from

his cigarette swirls upward through the beam, amethystine, and disappears grayly into the shadows.

“Naw, what the hell! That racket out there ain’t so sweet anyhow. I’ve been doin’ a little thinkin’. You scorch in the summer an’ never have enough pants in the winter, an’ sometimes you eat an’ sometimes you don’t.”

“Jesus Christ, man,” Ford argues, “it’s better than puttin’ in the rest of it spoilin’ bowlders, ain’t it?”

“No it ain’t it, not for me, lad. What the

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hell! Where do you get off at out there anyhow?” Red Mike asks the question wearily, addressing it to life. “You get a hideful o’ scat once in a while an’ a flop with some old haybag. An’ if you’re lucky the bulls won’t sap you more’n now an’ then.”

We untangle ourselves, uncramp, and prepare to leave. Mike’s case will need some talking on. “Well, if I was you,” Ford says finally, “I’d do my damndest to break, I’ll tell you.”

Red looks at him a long minute. “Well — yeah — you’re still young, that’s why.”

44

VII TEDDY

SHE was taken with some others in a Saturday night excrescence of police activity and brought here as part of the overflow from the city keep. She is lucky, but knows it not. Masters was awake when she came in, and declares she was sober as bricks. Some of the others were slightly touched.

Sunday is the worst of all visiting days here. The office fills early, and the others must receive through the slatted steel. A show without theatricals, this. No limes here. Only the thin checkers of light that filter through the dismal, enfeebling windows and on through the steel. No green spot for pallor. Time is the spot. From no scenery warehouse was ever resurrected a mounting the like of this. Scenic men go dumb when they try for an effect like this. Most of them are afraid of such an effect. ‘Well...

45

When the drapes close here you are on the street, gone to stir, or stiff.

A man and a woman are outside the girl’s segment of the slats. Pink shines through the incomprehension on their faces. A well-fed pair, this — comfortable. Clothes they wear to make the fierce wind the more fierce that he cannot penetrate them.

“But I don’t want to leave that way, mother,” the girl pleads. A moment before she was bantering.

“Teddy! How did this happen? Are you mad? Who are you — one of these...” A wave of the hand does for the word she cannot find. We are beyond her life, and therefore beyond her vocabulary. “We have seen Blake. We found him after service. He is arranging for your release. Now be reasonable.”

“Dad,” she appeals, “make mother see that I want this experience.”

“You and your experiences,” her mamma scoffs.

“Well, but Teddy,” her father makes tardy answer, “your mother’s feelings.”

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“Oh, mother’s feelings! Are you failing me, too? Or are you not going to be old-fashioned?”

“Teddy, you are coming out as soon as Blake arrives, and we’ll have no more of your foolishness, please. Do you know your father has been working with the papers the last two hours, trying to keep your name out? And he did not succeed, so we all have that to face.”

“There you go, mother — the old restraining influence... Teddy intends trying to joke her parent from her firmness. ”Dad, mother has been her dear, dear daughter’s anchor. But the rope busted. Now she’s trying to catch the derelict. No use, madre.”

We who have no visitors concentrate on Teddy in a silence that smacks its lips. We watch her protuberant delights quiver beneath her thin dress when she stomps a foot, tosses an arm. Her flesh is a svelte flame climbing a structure of fluent bone and breaking over at the top in a curled mass of new-gold hair, lilting

with motion. She is like no girl, no woman, any of us ever has known. Ours is the harlot and the embruted village wench, for whom the body of the

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first is a medium of exchange, and of the second the sole and soggy road to release.

“Father doesn’t seem so keen against this as you, mother o’ mine,” Teddy insists. “Father, you old devil, you relish the idea of my being here, but you’re afraid of your dear wife. How could such a hell-fire old fellow as you...”

“Teddy! I’ll not have it. This is the Sabbath!” her mother almost screams. “Gracious, child, one would think you one of these...” Again the gesture. “Father and I shall go this minute and leave you to get yourself out of this mess if you insist on being willful.”

“Do, mother dear, do please,” Teddy coos at her, rolling her body archly on the balls of her feet. “You’re a tot, sweet, to say that. Do go and leave me. I do want to see this thing through. These interesting people, mother! And think of being in front of the judge. Think of it, mother! I’d lie easier to-night with that prospect before me than without it.”

“And I’d lie easier... well...” a man down at the end of our bench growls, twiddling his torso.

48

“Why, mother, these people are only unfortunate, you know very well they are, and you won’t admit it. Am I in any real sense better than they?”

Her father has become a bit wearied of the affair and begins making small, brisk movements with hands

and elbows, pulling on his gloves and fingering his rich scarf. "You had better take mother's advice this once, Teddy, and don't give her any more to worry about just now. She has had a very trying morning." He is ineffectually gentle.

"But, father, no. I do not want to accede and I do not want to be willful. But you and mother make it hard. Really, you know, my life has not been ruined by this. It cannot be. You make so much of it. It is fun, but it is something more. I want to study these people and learn their different points of view."

Masters chuckles loudly and has trouble choking back a full-throated laugh. "Won't she look fine studyin' me? Hunh, hunh. The little fool, what's she up to?" He looks almost shy at the thought of becoming a subject of the

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girl's inquiries. We can see the picture he sees, this sunbeam playing over his craggy face with the matted skin and trying to lay straight the labyrinth of half a century outside the law that lies curled behind his louse-tracked breast. At the first turning she would start a dragon of cheap sin that would make her sear her throat screeching for the mother she pretends to scorn. Masters did three hitches in stir before Teddy was born.

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"Teddy," her mother begins again, briskly, with an air that says she has lined her arguments in combat order and will not halt until she has carried this dear battlement. "Teddy, go and bring your wrap. Blake will

be here shortly. I do not wish to make a scene, more than has already been made, for these... Still only a gesture. Either she never knew the devastatingly right word or, having learned it, always has been restrained by her yesterdays from giving it voice. "Go, now. Father and I must be firm."

Father has supplied little for either side. A careful man, father. He has applied his eyes to

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the scene as often as Teddy's war with his wife has permitted, and is interested, but repelled. Teddy hesitates, as if she still hopes a favorable decision may be reached. But "Go, Teddy," her mother says once again, sharply final.

Teddy climbs the stair to the women's ward, and returns after a minute carrying her cloak. Eyes linger at her knees as she kicks the hem of her skirt out, descending.

Blake arrives after ten minutes. The jailer comes in and tells him and Teddy's parents to go around to the office. He is in his best form, and escorts Teddy across the bull-pen to the door. "Bye, bye, mamma," someone calls after her, lubricity shading his voice. She flashes around at the door, her eyes crackling indignation. This small remark has lighted the full fire of the conventions of her world. She will leave us with a mind snuggling close to her mother's.

• • • • •

Slowly the visitors trickle away and the shadows begin to clot into darkness in the pen. At lockup we go to our kennels silent, some shamed with the horror of

their desire and the others afraid to penetrate that
shame with the

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filth that is in them. Silence is still master as we stretch
in our bunks. We lie awake, late, still silent, sweating
out nauseous dreams behind the terrible shutters of the
night.

52

VIII EVENSONG

I 'M gettin' kind of sick of bearin' that nigger A moan up there every night. I'm goin' to tell him so, an' if he don't like it, I'll bust him."

"Yes you'll bust him. He'll break you in two, and it's well you know it... Give us some of that Durham, Harry."

At this point Denkert puts in, "Yes, Scully, he sure can do it. Take a good look sometime at the way he's put together."

"Well, I'll use a knife on him then, whaddyu think of that," sneers Scully.

"I think it's just what it is — air," Denkert answers. "What do you care about what kind of a noise he makes, anyway? He's doing his time, and he don't bother no one. We like to hear him." We come near to having a fight.

"Well, 'I don't like to hear him, see."

"All right, he'll begin before long. Then

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you'll see him tomorrow afternoon. We'll all come out and watch you call him... And watch him eat you."

.

Ed cannot hear us. He is up in his cell on the second wall tier, clicking the dice with which he practices for hours without let. When all the jailhouse is very quiet, as it is for an occasional moment during the day, we

can hear the soft flutter of the cubes as they whirl along the taut blanket.

The second and last meal of the day has been eaten and the pans have been taken up. Softly, as in a dream, the first shadows gather at the angles of the walls and the ceiling. Near the top the walls turn through mauve to purple, and then go black. Imperceptibly the shadow line moves a quarter of the distance down. A second band moves upward from the floor. The lower windows gray, fade, go out. Here and there in the huge building noises die and leave almost tangible silence in their place. So gradually, then, that we do not know how it happens, sound stops completely, and fleeting peace passes over everything.

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Low and darkly resonant, then, sounds the Negro's evensong, sung deep in the throat behind closed lips. The starkness of the longing he expresses makes the listener feel helpless, feel as one who topples slowly into utter depth, without power to stay himself. The song has just enough tonal nuance to keep it this side of dead monotone. It is the soul's futility put to the music of the voice.

As we listen, darkness comes in through the pores of the building and fills it. No light. No sound but the song, rising now in tone and deepening in emotional quality. Ed opens his lips and shapes words, a plaint the levees have known for long...

*Lawd, I'se a poo-wer old niggah man,
Spilin' wid dis life,
Said dis life;
Lawd, I'se a low down niggah man,
Spi-i-i-i-lin' wid dis life.*

• • • • •

Ed stands at the window each night, his hands gripping the bars, we have been told by a man in the rotary who has seen him. Beyond the

55

bars, there in the dark, are presences. Ed is jungle haunted at this hour. His Afric race memory wells up and commands him. He goes back, back, back, beyond the sea, beyond the white discoverer, beyond fire. Things that never have been in his life slide menacingly on their bellies through a vine-knit darkness. The creepers on the trees move of their own will. Eyes burn with hunger low against the ground. A stricken bird screams once, the leaves chatter for a little space, then silence again, more awfully tense.

Longing passes altogether out of the voice. Now there is fear — fear larger than the night, constricting the heart and shortening the blood's rhythm. The song becomes no more than a stumble of low sound in the great box of Ed's breast. It ends in a coughing shudder as the jailer snaps up the lights. The ju-ju man goes home and Ed turns back to his dice.

56

IX

“AND IN A YEAR”

F AIR as a god? Perhaps the Greek anciently did think of the young gods as being made in this wise. And perhaps, that granted, the friendship of man and boy — that intimacy of the flesh that we here and to-day revolt against — did, as some have it, become the Levantine reality that cloaked itself with the name platonic friendship. Even to-day the Levant is... well, like a jailhouse.

All the wolves in the place seek company with Joe. He is not only the youngest — youth can be other than this — he also is the fairest. Among us he is the canary among the crows. His hair is the color of the canary, and his eyes are large, brilliant, blue — femininely brilliant and femininely soft. His cheeks, rounded as the perfect cheeks of a yellow plum, have the yellow plum's misty overlay of blush, and the down on them is

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faint. The nostrils of his slightly tilted nose are long and sensitive.

One note in the melody of this face is out of harmony. Under the cream-smooth flesh of the cheeks is a jaw that has inherited the shape of stubbornness. It is will, but the wrong kind. And in the mentality behind the ivory skin of the forehead, it is plain, is that same shape of stubbornness.

On the book is “Joseph Meadows; 17; robbery with a gun,” and some other details. How? Why? None knows. All we know is that Joseph Meadows, 17, will be the fair heart of some kind of storm before he leaves us.

The jailer, the day he brought Joe in, was the most puzzled man in all the jailhouses in the land. Large on his large face was writ the question, Where to put Joe? He looked at one of us, he looked at another, he looked at all, and he didn’t like what he saw. He could not be sure. Ordinarily, no compunction. But Joe is different, and some vagrant, unsuspected quirk of goodness had made the skipper want to protect. The boy is the first time fallen.

He finally decided on the block that runs at a

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right angle to the women’s ward and opens off the women’s end of the gallery. And he was wrong.

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They are at it again to-night. Joe is pleading through tears, “You get out of here, now, and let me alone. I’m not bothering you. Go on away from here and stop bothering me.”

A lusting voice calls from somewhere outside the block, “Go on and give it to him, kid, you’re only goin’ to be young once.” Others elsewhere, sharing vicariously in the attempt, shout advice to the boy, encouragement to the man. “What’s the use of bein’ so good lookin’, kid, if you’re goin’ to keep it? Be nice and have some fun...” “Have at him, Hammer; I’m for you and with you.”

Joe's voice comes nearer to us in the federal wing. He is at the door opening to the gallery. "Mister Jailer... say... Mister Jailer, will you come up here? Say..."

"What's the matter, son?" old George asks from the bull-pen. And then, "Go on in your cell, now, nobody's going to bother you."

59

George is night jailer because... he is not the day jailer.

"But they are bothering me," Joe insists, his voice blurred with tears of fear. "Take me out of here, will you, please?"

"I'm not bothering you, you little snitch," a voice behind him in the block says.

"Well, Hammer is, and he's got no right to. Will you take me out of here, mister?"

Mock pleading falls down from a cell on the wall. "Sure, boss, take him out and put him up here with me. He'll like it up here."

"You better go on and go to sleep, now, son," George tells him. "They won't bother you."

"But, mister, they do bother me, and they've got no right to. Can't you take me out of here? I could sleep on a bench."

"No, son, not to-night. The rats are bad down here, anyway. You go on in and go to sleep." He turns away toward the rotary.

"But I tell you they do bother me," Joe almost screams.

“Just go on in your cell and forget them,” George’s voice comes back faintly from behind the rotary.

60

Hammer cannot keep his eyes off. He follows Joe about, leering, his being shut up to everything but the boy. The others do not exist. Joe looks sullen and his face has begun to pinch. The jailhouse and terror are setting the sign on him. He drops onto a bench, and in a minute Hammer is beside him, fat with jail bloat and ugly as only his kind of vices can be ugly. The skipper watches the pair as much as he can, but visitors keep him in the office most of the time.

Joe sits a few minutes, then rises and starts toward the far side of the pen. Hammer overtakes him and catches his left arm. Joe wheels suddenly and his right fist smacks the side of Hammer’s wide chin. Hammer looks startled and the fist smacks again, well aimed and hard driven. Hammer’s head flops back on its short, dirty neck. His wits are stricken, but finally he gets his hands up. Joe is the taller, and carries no fat. Smack again goes the right fist, high on the chin. Hammer curses filthily as he feels blood on his lip. He steps in to drive and Joe retreats sidewise. “Get him, Joe, before the screw ‘comes back,’” someone in the quickdrawn circle cautions.

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The encouragement rushes Joe into action again. He becomes an engine driving two pistons. Again, again, again his fists smack into Hammer’s face. Hammer has not placed a blow. “Hook for that belly, kid!” Joe looses his left into the yielding paunch and Hammer

folds up. "The kid's good!" Over goes Joe's right. Hammer topples. Joe rushes him and shoves him off his feet. He needs no advice now. His right foot flashes, and again. Hammer's hands reach feebly for his groin and his face takes the color of soiled white paper.

"Beat it into the toilet, Joe, the screw'll be back in a minute!"

And in a minute he is. But all he finds amiss is Hammer in the middle of the bull-pen, painhaltered and rolling on the floor. "Hey, you birds, who the hell done this?"

"Try and find out."

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After lockup we talk it over. "That kid is some surprise. I never saw anybody win anything so easy as that. That big fathead up there just rolled around and took it."

62

"That's half a battle, that first wallop. That's the one that wins, nine times out of ten."

"Yeh — wins," Frenchy Le Pine scoffs. "You think he won something, do you? Well, he didn't."

"How do you figure?"

"Easy. That kid was doin' all right. They wouldn't of got to him. But do you know how he is now? Well he's hard, that's how. He's trimmed an old-timer, and that settles it for a kid. From now on there'll be no stoppin' him 'til they get him in a bighouse. If he hadn't of had that fight he'd of gone on out to his folks and everything'd of been Jake. But not now. All these

other babies'll tell him how good he is, and before he goes out him and somebody else'll have the next job all figured out. That scrap was the worst thing that could of happened to him."

"Well, I still don't see how you figure."

"Brother, I don't have to figure. I went through the same thing, just exactly the same thing, only I was about a year older. I trimmed a hard log, and for the same reason. And in a year I was in Walla Walla."

X SALVATION

SOME of us do not like Sunday, those of us who have no visitors and those of us who think most of our own views of the Christ. The best we can say for it is that we receive an extra potato in our pans. We stand or sit about in our cells and the pen, trying to be inconspicuous in the eyes of the visitors. The first band of soul-thumpers will be along soon. They will not be so bad. The worst — or best — is the one to follow. The Shiverer is a member of it. Those of us who know the big jail wish ourselves back there. We would not be asked to come to salvation there.

The jailer ushers in an old man who has come to talk with his son. The old man is shabby. He talks inconsequential with the stalwart boy and looks sad reproaches at him. He passes

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money into the boy's hand — a quarter and a dime — and goes out.

The first band of saviors comes, holds a brief service at which two men attend, and goes away. More visitors come.

We hear a stir in the office. The Shiverer has come. The leader of the band bounces through the door behind a sirupy smile and walks rapidly around the outside corridor to the back of the pen. His supports follow, clashing tambourines. The Shiverer is in the

middle of the file. We who do not care for the service move as far away as possible.

“Now, my brothers, if you will all come up.” The leader has the hard briskness of the street corner fakir, and opens his service as the fakir opens his pack. “Come down close, if you will. You cannot avoid the Lord anyway, you know.” He laughs at his devout pleasantry, wrinkling his fat nose.

• • • • •

A few move down to the back of the pen, among them a Negro and a Mexican. The leader peers hard at the Negro and thumbs a hymn book. The Shiverer passes books through

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the bars, simpering into the face of each man. All sing something about

*There is glory up in heaven
And we all want to go.*

“Brothers and sisters,” begins the leader. The only sisters are those he brought along.

“...Cannot escape the Judgment, for as you sow, so shall you reap. Each of us is sinful.” One man walks out of the meeting and flops down on a bunk in his cell. “But there is a way, my dear people, there is a way; and it is the only way...”

We at the front edge along toward the back, so as to be near the congregation but not of it. We are not insensible to the curious.

“We will pray,” announces the leader at the conclusion of his preachment. All bow their heads. The Shiverer clasps her hands and bows slightly. From under her brows she glances at the prisoners. The prayer begins. The Shiverer rolls her protruding eyes about at the others in her band. Her chin begins to tremble, and she punctuates the prayer with alleluias.

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“And we hope to rest forever in the Lord...”

“Alleluia!” the woman cries. Her head is quivering violently and her flat black hat seems in danger of falling off.

“...Christ who died for us...”

“Alleluia!” She drops to her knees on the concrete. “Alleluia!” Her clasped hands, held out from her body breast high, oscillate rapidly in the air. “Alleluia!” Her head flutters. Her chin vibrates with fly-wing speed. “Alleluia!”

“O my brothers and my sisters...”

“Alleluia!” She rocks forward and back in frenetic ecstasy. “Alleluia!” Her eyes roll madly, her lips are half parted, and her head rocks until the mass on top of it gives way, the hair going down one side and the hat down the other.

“And verily it is said, O my people...”

“Alleluia!”

“That many are called...”

“Alleluia!” She bends forward, straightens up, and falls sidewise. A paroxysm rides her. Her feet rap a tattoo from the concrete and spittle

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dribbles over her flying lips. “Alleluia!” she screams, “alleluia!”

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The mill has not stopped even for the Lord. The jailer opens the door at the front and tumbles a tumultuous drunkard into the pen. Blood runs down the right side of his face from under the ear. He looks waveringly toward the back and, when his eyes fix the scene for his mind, he bawls—

“Alleluia!”

XI

CARPENTER SHEPPARD

VISALIA SLIM and big Gerhardt wrestle across the bull-pen, at horseplay. Visalia, loud, braggart, would be a bully if he had not so much real courage. He is a puzzle, a long-legged contradiction with a jaw like a donkey's.

The two are cursed by singers, strollers, gamblers. They careen around and around, hauling at each other, and bring up finally against a table. Down it goes, making a small crash. The legs peep out comically from under the top lying on them.

"Now ain't you sma't boys," Bantas protests as he gathers his tossed cards from the floor.

"Just for that, Slim, you get no more exercise in this pen for a month," the jailer announces, coming up. He places flabby hands on wide hips and surveys the wreck. "Not for a month."

"Aw, say, skipper, wasn't you ever young?"

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Visalia cries. "Anyhow, there was two of us. Come on, now, don't get sore at the young fellows."

The jailer looks at him, half amused. "You old fool," he says, his eyes catching some of the twinkle from Visalia's, "you're older than I am. You ought to have better sense. Some day you'll be rompin' around here and you'll crack up your stiff legs."

Visalia marks the alteration in the jailer's view and returns. "Right you are, there, skipper. Us old ones

stand no chance with young punks like Gerhardt around.” He turns. “Gerhardt, you’re staying in your cell a month for this. The skipper says so. Pick up that table and put it against the slats. And quit bothering us old fellows.”

Old Sheppard, who has been standing in the circle around the jailer and the playboys, steps out and addresses Visalia. “You oughtn’t to talk about being old. I am old — sixty-one. I’m older than the two of you. But I can fix that table. It’ll give me a chance to keep my hand in.”

“How so?” the skipper asks.

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“I’m a carpenter, mister, that’s how so. I been at it all my life. But if I stay here without anything to do my hand’ll get out. Now you just let me have that table. I’ll make it better’n new. You just get me a few tools and some nails to slap into ’er. An old man don’t stand no show if his hand gets out.”

“Gettin’ to be a reg’lar old men’s home in here,” says the jailer. He studies Sheppard. The old man stands squarely, eager to get to work. “You a carpenter?” the jailer inquires of him, as if he had not been told.

“Mister, you been in this town so long and don’t remember the shop at Tenth and Vine — on Vine?” He is quietly indignant. “ ‘Sheppard — Job Carpenter — Repairing’? Made that sign myself. Painted it, too. Put the words on. I was there twenty-odd year, mister, same place.”

Visalia tiptoes away, grinning. His case is forgotten. The jailer looks at Sheppard. Then he looks at the table, gravely, cocking his head as if he expected it to rise up and apologize for sprawling in his presence. Again he turns to Sheppard. The old man's mild brown eyes fill with appeal. He is labor, bored with idleness.

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"Well, come on then," the jailer decides. He starts for the door to the office, the bowed little carpenter trotting at his side, like an old dog happy to know he has not been abandoned.

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Sheppard returns to the pen alone, carrying a box filled with the tools of his trade and a collection of other things — bolts, parts of hinges, a machinist's hammer with a broken handle, knotted wire. "Look at that stuff," he exclaims, bending over the box. "Fine kind of a man'll let good tools get like that, all bit up with rust. I alius said to the old woman, 'Maybe I don't make so much, but my tools is alius bright.' She never could understand why a man likes to keep his things neat-like." He roots into the mass of junk underneath the tools and finds a small oil can. "Now, there! If there's anything in that we'll have 'em like new money."

Bantas is impatient. "OF sojer, you fixin' dis heah table or makin' things peart?"

"Never you mind, now. You can't work so fast at some things. Keepin' your hand in can't be done just knockin' in nails." He oils his handkerchief and caresses the saw blade as lovingly

as a mother her baby's cheek. "See that!" He beams on the blade and it glitters back at him.

"You can't saw no bars with that thing, man," someone laughs at him. "And maybe you think skip don't know that. You ain't foolin' nobody."

Sheppard polishes and smiles, and at length goes to the broken table.

"Heah we goes," Bantas mocks. "Watch 'at table hop up now. Jus' lahk de debbil."

Sheppard goes into a corner when he has finished and spills the small contents of the box onto the floor beside the tools. He sorts the heap and places each bit neatly in the bottom of the box, pausing occasionally to inspect some item closely. Before lockup the jailer comes in and pronounces the work good, and takes away the tools.

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Sheppard and Gordon sit on a bench, Sheppard talking and Gordon listening. "Some ways it was better after the old woman died," the carpenter tells. "Henry and Virgil grew up before she left, but they didn't go 'way 'til after. One of 'era's a carpenter, same's I am. But they

wouldn't leave while she was alive. I taught 'em better. I used to sing 'em that song about hair turnin' gray. Them days I was some of a singer. The boys both worked along in the shop with me before the old woman died. But Henry didn't take to it. He's drivin'

truck now. Ever hear that song? Do a lot of these whippersnappers in here good to mark that one.”

“Go on, sing it,” Gordon banters. “If it’s sad, I’ll cry.”

“I’ll try a bit of it. But... It goes like this:

*Stick to your mother, Tom,
When I am...*

His pale voice stumbles. He stretches his neck, as does a hen swallowing corn, and begins again:

*Stick to your mother, Tom,
When I am gone;
Don’t let her worry, lad,
Don’t let her mourn:
Remem...*

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*Remember that she nursed you
When I was far away;
So stick, to your mother
When her hair turns gray.*

“Like that, it goes. I alius sung it to them two boys when they was growin’ up and started talkin’ big about leavin’. Now if somebody sung it to some of these young fellers in here, they wouldn’t be in here — or sung ’em or told ’em something like is in that song. There’s a heap of good can be learnt just from a song.”

Gordon is not visibly touched. He looks sidewise at Sheppard, awaiting what shall be next. “And my boys

is all right, 'cause of them songs and things like that. The old woman alius said I was wrong about raisin' boys." He muses, gazing far off. "But she never did understand men.

"Them boys is all right. Virgil's best. He's the carpenter. Sent me money the other day, that boy, in a letter. He likes wood, same's I do. Wood'll do things for a man if he knows how to get at it. Things like that's what women don't understand."

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Silence sits between them. Sheppard looks around the pen.

"Days is all alike in here, ain't they?" he asks. He is talking aloud to himself now. Gordon has forgotten him and through the door of the women's ward is eying a girl slicking herself in a hand mirror. "Every one of 'em's just alike. 'Tain't right. And there's too much steel in here — not enough wood for a carpenter. Mister man said I can wire them chairs in the office, though. That'll help some. He said maybe he'd let me fix up them broken shelves in some of the cells after 'while."

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When did he plan it? The day the table was smashed? The day he talked with Gordon? When?

The old man is gone. The tool box held many things, and among them was release for Carpenter Sheppard. Patiently — good workman — he scraped away at the bricks in the back wall of his cell, where there was no steel sheeting. Rust had eaten the sheeting years before. The carpenter stowed the

powder in the mattress on the unoccupied bunk in his cell. On the night

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when the pocket was deep enough for his purpose he broke away the outer shell and went. Unoriginal — an ordinary escape. Thirty feet down on the twisted blankets. Yet — he was an old man, past any adventuring his life may have known. The job is well done.

Too well. We will be confined to our cells six weeks for this. The old devil! But the jailer will need all his influence to keep himself in post here. And his days with us will be soured until something else occurs to catch our attention. A brassy voice jeers to him where he sits alone in the pen:

“Hey, you, skipper — got any old bowlegged tables you want mended?”

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XII

THE REBEL

HE is an industrial Christ, scrutinizing our minds by the smoking red torch of his creed, an urge to revolt and an insistence on its necessity. Three nights ago the law hooked him off his gutter rostrum and holed him up here in an attempt to make him snuff the light. In that, The Rebel's eyes say, the law will fail. Then the law will make him suffer. Release for the law's repression will mean repression for The Rebel. Everyone will lose.

He has talked young Callahan the pimp into a corner and is spraying him with a mixture of Marx and Bakunin flavored with someone else. He is trying to show Callahan how under the current economic order as he sees it pimps are inevitable, even necessary, although loathsome.

"Don't you see?" he asks his victim. "The women who support you are the product of a

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system of suppression — of wage slavery — that denies a certain portion of the lower class population even the opportunity to be wage slaves in the usual sense. These, mostly women — and some miscasts like yourself — are forced to become another kind of slaves."

Brave laddie, The Rebel, for Cal is a battler. He seems now to be awaiting the just-right insult that shall be his excuse for unsetting some of The Rebel's teeth.

The jailer spoils it by announcing a visitor for Cal. He seems reluctant to leave, sorry he did not hand The Rebel the fives for his last remark. He may have to wait days for another chance to show for the boys, may even never have another chance.

The Rebel is tireless. His slim body with the narrow head is aflutter with energy. He has the gab and the figures and the intention of using them until he is cut down. Cal gone to the office, over he comes to Kallich. "Kallich," he begins, "you told me the other day you were in Butte for the last six years up to a few weeks ago."

"Yeh?" Kallich flares at him. "Yeh? Well — what about it? Know anything dif'rent?"

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The Rebel is cool. "No. I just wanted to ask you — why did they kill Frank Little?"

"Who the hell was Frank Little and who the hell killed him? And why did they do it, hunh?"

"Frank Little was a miner, a crippled miner," The Rebel patiently explains. "Also an industrial unionist, a class-conscious worker, a revolutionist and..."

"Well, then, why the hell shouldn't they kill 'im?" Kallich would know. "Anyway, I must 'a' been drunk that night. How did they get him?"

"Dragged him from his bed in the night and cracked his neck on a rope through a railroad trestle."

"Well — for bein' a revolutionist, like you said? Why was he one?"

This leads The Rebel to a survey of conditions in the copper diggings, the displacement of men by

machines in all industry, and the death of care for men in the growth of solicitation for the machines. He is off, passing mileposts on labor's *via dolorosa* so fast Kallich does not even see them. Soon he is talking as if to a multitude instead

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of to the half dozen of us who have nothing better to do than listen to him. His speech is gaudy with phrases that fascinate — “economic interpretation of history,” “vicarious exhibitionism,” “the end, in the struggle for control of life, justifies the means,” “cultural incidence of the machine process.”

Kallich dips into disgust and comes up with an inspiration. “Hey,” he fleers, “if you’re so God damned smart, how come the law’s got you in here?” He hooks his thumbs into his belt and gloats. Satisfaction teeters his body forward and back, lifting heels and toes. He licks his lips, savoring his small winnings.

The Rebel appraises him out of sincere blue eyes. He understands, without pitying. Removing heaps of misapprehension from the fields of the mind to make them shining fair is his pleasure.

“I do not — did not — even try to avoid arrest. There is no real charge against me. They may invent one, but there is none now. What is more, the law, which is only one of many tools in the hands of our masters, will go down when they go down.”

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“Hot dam!” little Wade explodes, “won’ dat be de sunny time!” His eyes pop with vision in his thin, chocolate face. “No law atall! Hot dam! Me fo’ you,

white folks. Go on an' preach to 'em, son. Git dis law out de way. Den us kin snatch ouah women an' blow ouah snow an'..."

"But," The Rebel cuts in, "that is not the proper conception of what will result from the overthrow. Besides, your race, the colored race, presents a problem within a problem, and must do double duty towards establishing the new régime."

Kallich can bear it no longer. He is ignorance fearing and therefore hating an intelligence larger than his; waywardness despising — because unable to understand — a purpose. He cannot hold up an end mentally, so he bursts forth physically. "Aw, nuts," he hammers out, and turns away, stomping his bitter antagonism into the greasy stone floor. He rushes away across the bull-pen. Halfway he stops to throw back, "Yer just plain nuts. They oughta make you stretch a line like this bird Little you was talkin' about."

Persistent, The Rebel. He turns. "But listen,

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Kallich." He starts walking toward his evilwisher.

Kallich squares. "All right, now, you listen. If you foller me any more I'm goin' to let you have this," he declares, and raises a terrific fist.

The Rebel walks on, his slim body seeming the more slim for Kallich's bulk. "But listen," he insists, implores.

The hairy bolt flies and The Rebel drops, crumpling. Agony twists him over onto his back. His lips are burst and blood boils down each side of his chin.

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Luckily for all of us, the jailer is held in the office. Still a matter of visitors. We heave Christ up and carry him into the toilet off the bull-pen, next the rotary. Kallich goes along. Water sloshed into The Rebel's face washes him 'round to consciousness.

"Hell's fire, Kallich, you oughtn't to of done that. You might of croaked him," someone protests.

Kallich answers, "Well the son of a bitch, somebody oughta croak him."

XIII

RATS

C HILDEN has read so many shiver magazines that he talks like them. When he hears the hurry of the rats across the bull-pen he begins, "Here they come, men. Look out! The wolves are on the trail. Here they come, whettin' their teeth. They've got empty bellies tonight, so pull up the blankets. Don't let 'em hang down on the floor. The rats'll climb 'em and bite your lips off. Here they come."

Janicek calls to him, "Hey, cut that out, you're scarin' me so I won't be able to sleep."

At night we enjoy a new perfume, a distinct musky animal odor, something like the breath of rotting paper, but less acid, more alive. It slides upward from plane to plane in the dark, heavy night air. We often speak of it, but cannot decide if it is pleasant or unpleasant.

We are at the spring of the year. The rains

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began a week ago, and the low areas of the city are collecting water underground. Sewers and drains are filling and the river is over its banks in places and into the warehouses and shanties. The rodent refugees are hunting higher ground. Somewhere in the tunnel is a passage opening from a lower reach of darkness. Through this and other breaches the rats have invaded us, adding their effluvium to the sour stream the tunnel and the toilets belch over us.

As we listen to the multitudinous squealing and snarling of the visitors Allbright remarks, "They'll be leaner a week from now than they are now. Do you know what'll happen then? They'll start eating each other up, like the bums in California."

Masters scoffs, and Allbright answers, "All right, brother, wait and see. I've put in a lot of time down in the Delta country, and I've seen it happen more than once. Some of them get so thin and weak they can't track any longer, like hopheads on their last go-round. Then the stronger ones jump them and gobble them down. There will be a lot less of them going out of here than there were coming in. Wait and see. Some

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of them just curl up and die and... Sc-h-h. Look out there — easy. Look at the size of that one!"

We look out of the cell into the corridor, under the shelf inside the door. Backed against the slats is one of the largest specimens of the tribe most of us have ever seen. Along his sides he is stippled with white. An old one. He is sprung on a million nerves, strung for flight, but hunger keeps him where he is. His eyes glow with the wild evil that food-craving is, and his nose twitches constantly. He has a clever old face.

"Sc-h-h," Allbright whispers. "Slip me a shoe. I'll see if I can nail him." Someone passes him a shoe. Slowly, slowly, he draws his throwing arm back, bending his mouth out of shape with the effort to hold his body quiet. The shoe snaps into the corridor. The rat dodges, jumps, and flashes away, followed by a dozen that have come in unnoticed and have been

prowling in the end of the corridor, near the toilet. Sometimes bread and other refuse of meals floats in the toilet. That is the attraction.

“Get him?” Childen asks from two cells away.

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“Better not miss, boy, or they’ll eat us up. Wolves are on the trail, men.”

“Say, Allbright,” Masters says, “you’ve been every place and seen everything — tell you what I’ll do. I’ll lay you a bet Old Pegleg don’t make a meal for any of them outside rats. The old boy has been in here at least three years, accordin’ to the skipper, and if there’s any eatin’ done this year, I’ll bet he does some of it. Whaddyu say? I’ll lay you a fiver to a fiver he’ll be here a month from now, when the others is gone — most of ’em. He’ll still be battin’ around on that stump. Whaddyu say?”

Allbright studies Masters. The bet is foolish. And Allbright has no fiver. Neither has Masters, likely. Masters is only talking. Allbright has not been with us long enough to have any history on Old Pegleg, but some of us know him well, hail him friend as he goes about our home in his three-cornered gallop.

“The old boy,” Masters explains for Allbright, “either got caught in a trap or had a battle somewhere in here, and one of his runners is gone. He prob’ly got sliced up scrappin’ over some slick mamma over there in the tunnel one

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night. And he prob’ly got the mamma, ’cause he’s still a bright old boy. Nothin’ like a woman to keep a man

goin', y'know. He's prob'ly got great-great-gran'children runnin' around in here, takin' lessons from the old settler."

"Well, I can't take the bet," Allbright says finally, "but if he's made it that long I hope he makes it some more. Funny how you feel about old animals, and old men. Take an old vic, for instance, some old pete man that's done half a dozen hitches in somebody's bighouse. You always feel that way about him — hope he lives to get drunk on a few wardens' graves. You don't like to see an old skate like that kick out. He's made it so long you want to see him make it longer. There's something to an old one like that. He's been a good battler or he wouldn't have lived so long, and he's been square or he wouldn't have done so many bits. Right?"

We agree.

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We laugh at Childen, but we do take some precautions at night. In the doorways of the cells we lay barriers of crumpled paper, so that if our blankets drape to the floors in the night

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and the rats vision us as meals they will wake us as they enter. We have taught the women in the ward upstairs to tie newspapers flat against the slats, so that they, too, will be roused if they are raided. Sue is frightened into spasms if but one rat is seen in the ward, and the Negress believes the animals are departed spirits.

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After we put out the lights the reserve battalions come up, and the movement of the animals throughout the den develops a noise like the low roaring of distant wind, counterpointed with their sharp, wiry voices. They boil in from the tunnel and up from under the rotary, fall into toilets, flow up the stairs and around the galleries in a panic of food-seeking, fight aimlessly all over the place, punctuating our sleep with periods of cursing wakefulness.

Sometimes in the pauses of their foraging we hear Old Pegleg. His stump goes “thump” on the bull-pen floor, “clack” on the heavy metal stairs, and “clang” on the light steel plates of the galleries. We can follow him wherever he moves so long as he travels on a hard surface. How he lives, we wonder. We have placed food for him

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many times, but never have been certain it was he that garnered it. His brothers are many, here, in the best of times. Now he will need all his powers to survive.

“Well, Masters,” Janicek says one night after the hordes have been with us almost three weeks, “seems like you’re right about Old Original. Hear him last night? I did. He was cruising on the galleries. What the hell he finds up there is more than I know, but he was there almost every time I was awake.”

“His woman lives up there,” Masters replies, grinning. “You know, ‘Gotta see mamma every night...’ The old girl prob’ly told ’im if he goes triflin’ she’ll take on one of these daddies from the other

sewer. Waddyu say now, Allbright — want that bet? You're damned right you don't."

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Five weeks have passed, and the ranks are thinning. Many, as Allbright predicted, have been eaten. Bits of carcass have been found in secluded corners. Some of the rats have crawled through holes in the floor plates of the wing and died, and are rotting under our noses.

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On a night of dribbling, mournful rain, like a Negress weeping, we are awakened by a desperate animal shriek. A spirited battle is in progress on the highest gallery. The rats tear at each other and their grappling bodies knock loudly on the plates. Half the jailhouse is awake. "Go it, bullies!" someone shouts. "Shut up and let 'em have at it!" he is admonished. Up and down the gallery the warriors struggle, each searching for the toothhold that shall be victory. Ten minutes, fifteen, they go. Fright has pinched the others near to silence. The war under the ceiling continues a few minutes longer, then suddenly stops. We forget it and return to sleep.

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A few days later when we are at exercise the jailer comes down off the gallery carrying a paper. He beckons us into a circle with his head as he places the paper on the floor of the bullpen. "There he is," he announces, kicking it open. Inside is the skeleton of a large rat. The right hind leg is gone at the knee. We look in silence. Then Masters speaks, although chagrined:

“Well, Allbright, you’re right. There’s your old safeblower. He’s pulled his last job.” He stops, then adds, “And now mamma gets a new bully.”

XIV

THE BOOKIE

WE know, to fear, only two diseases — syphilis and T. B. The new man looks as if he has one or the other, or both. His skin is drawn so tightly over the long, thin face that we wonder how he can close his eyes. His lips are pressed inward until the teeth show through them. We suspect that the body inside the neat gray suit is mostly bone, the coat hangs so slack at the shoulders, the trousers at knees and ankles.

Wrong to put him in with anyone else. There are cells that could be cleared by doubling occupants in others, and he could cell alone. We resent his presence not because of the man but because of our keepers' lack of consideration. Even jailbirds... No delicacy here, no tact. We ask the man:

“Hey, Jack, what’s wrong with you? You’re sick, aren’t you?”

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“Plenty,” he replies mildly, glancing about the group. “I’ve got the con. The con’s got me, I mean. They’ll have me in a hole in the ground before I use up all the time the old man passed out to me.” He opens his mouth wide, as if for a doctor’s inspection. “See back there?” We crowd around and peep, curiosity washing out fear of contagion. “The rot starts there and goes right on down, all the way.” He says it as he might say, “The electric line starts Here and runs to

There.” The jailer comes in on his last round before the night trick starts.

“Say, skipper,” we ask, “why the hell don’t you put this man in a cell by himself, where he belongs? He’ll give us all the con.”

“Quit sweatin’ about it. You’re all too hard for the con to take hold of you. That man’s a federal and he belongs in the federal wing.” He goes down to the lower deck. This is the federal wing. Ergo...

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We turn back to our new mate. He has not taken offense. Far otherwise. “I know I shouldn’t be in here with you people,” he says. “I ought to be alone. You’re right. In fact, I’d

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rather be alone. But this is the dear old hoosegow, brothers, and the skipper is it.”

This summary of his case turns us partly toward him. We know he did not choose his quarters. It is futile to try to keep away from him. He will be close to us as long as he is here. “Well, here,” says Janicek, coming back to the cell after a moment’s absence in the corridor, “use this cup, if it’s all the same to you. There’s two. You take this one. I scratched a mark on it.”

The man takes the cup, examines the mark, smiles, and leans to the lower end of his bunk, placing the cup atop the end of his suitcase. We had been fetched by it when its owner arrived, but had forgotten it.

“You won’t need the stuff that’s in there where you’re goin’, will you? How much did you get?”

“Ten to twenty-one. Why? There’s no clothes in there. A razor and strop and some books.”

“Oh, you’re a bookie?”

“How do you mean — the ponies? You’re wrong. Negotiables are my racket.”

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“I’m only jokin’, man. I know bookies don’t have books. What’s the books about? Where’d you get ’em?”

“Well, I was in Sedalia a long time while this trial was going on, and I met a fellow in there that beat his rap. He was somebody from in the town there, and his friends gave him these books. He gave them to me when he went out. Gave me all his money, too. Out of his clothes, I mean. He’d have given me his wife if she’d been around, he was so glad to hook it out of there. I’ve been reading the books. Good stuff in some of them.”

“What are they — story books?”

“Kind of... Some of them are. Philosophy, he said some of them are. Good stuff, too. Only I need a dictionary, or an interpreter, to get at some of the stuff that’s in them. Any of you own a dictionary?”

“No. There was some kind of a nut over in the rotary for a while that had one, some kind of a radical, he called himself. Kallich damned near killed him one day. Kallich is the bird you must ’a’ read about — the bird that killed the dick here in town when he was full of snow. He was

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so rummy he probably wouldn't 'a' let you have it anyway."

We have forgotten the decrepit lungs gurgling behind the meager breast. The books are collectively a phenomenon. Not that a book never has appeared among us. Now and again one has. But neither its owner nor any of us has given it much attention. Here in our wing we have something new — a suitcase full of books and a man who says he likes them.

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We make coffee. "Hey, Bookie, bring that cup out here and get some of this." He comes, unabashed by the cup and its significance. He is accepted now.

"Any of you boys want to look at some of these, come on," he offers when the coffee is gone. We file into his cell like children to a laden Christmas tree. "I'm using this one," he says. "You can have any of the other ones you want."

We pick up those that attract and leaf through them. "By God, me for this!" Ford shouts. "Kipling! Anybody can understand that baby."

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"Well, take him and get to hell out with your shoutin'."

Ford jigs away with the treasure. The offer has been so generous and The Bookie has so caught us in the few hours he has been here that each of us takes away a book. He is lying flat on his back, reading, before the last man leaves.

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"Come on, boy, put out that light."

The old night jailer walks about the door at the end of the corridor, squinting to see whose light it is. He can go around the wing only at the lower deck, and cannot see into the upper deck cells from there. The Bookie turns on his bunk and thrusts head and shoulders out to see who gave the order.

“Put it out, son. It’s the rules.”

“Listen, old man,” The Bookie replies, “I’ll promise to die a week from now if you’ll just forget the rules that long. I want to finish something here.” He laughs pleasantly.

“I can’t make new rules for you,” the jailer explains, “even for a promise like that. You’ll live long enough anyway.”

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“How about a candle?” The Bookie pursues. “Suppose I burn a candle — then what?”

“And burn up the bedclothes, eh?”

“How about all of us smoking — that’s a chance, too. I’ve got a piece of candle here — how about that?”

“Oh, all right, burn it,” the jailer exclaims despairingly. “You will anyway, I suppose. I can’t watch all of you all the time. But no noise, mind that.”

• • • • •

We others lie in darkness for a time. Then Grey is overcome by an idea. “Hey,” he calls softly, “let’s have a game on that other bunk. You don’t care, do you, lungs?”

“Go ahead, you won’t bother me.”

Four of us sit on the bunk and play. The Bookie has sealed the candle to a scrap of cardboard and placed it behind his head and as far as he may toward the outer edge of his bunk, accommodating himself to our needs. His book holds him.

When he coughs we bend our heads into our breasts, resuming the play when the ruinous explosions cease. We go on until our eyelids collapse,

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then decide to pass the deal once around and go to bed.

“Say,” The Bookie’s half whisper calls to us, “listen to this. It’s at the top of a page here.” He hunches up onto an elbow and holds the book more fully into the light. We note how thin the hair at the back of his head has grown. “This is just like the way I am now. Listen, it says, ‘Life... The page slips from under his thumb. He pulls it back with the other hand. “Listen now. It says, ‘Life is a little bird. It rests for the night on the bough of a tree, and in the morning flies away.’ ”

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XV

“HIM? HE’S THE BANKER”

ALL but one of us is looking at him for the first time. He steps through the office door, and when he sees us milling in the bull-pen, stops — like death looking back at life. We know at once that his countenance has acquired its ghast delineation only recently. The beard does not belong to the cream of skin at the tops of the cheeks, nor has the mat of hair above the coat collar ever before sullied that silken neck. His eyes — good Christ! How can a man admit such shame to his fellows?”

“Who the hell’s he?”

“Who — him? He’s The Banker. He came in the night they forgot to lock up Bad Checks.”

“What banker?”

“The one that got caught at it.”

“What the hell’s the matter with him now — is he clean broke?”

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“Not as far as money goes — no. But his guts are gone.”

“Guts! Don’t tell me that guy ever had any guts.”

Has he heard us? We are across the pen from him. He seems to have fallen into a soft freeze since he came in. His wilting eyes creep from one face to another, skulking away whenever another pair tries to catch them.

“Well, I’ll be God damned,” doubtingly. “How the hell does a man go so rotten?”

We will have the freedom of the pen for another hour. Card games are going. Three men are making harmony in a corner, one trying a new flat effect in a popular tune he has brought in and taught the others. In a nook behind a table Goldie sits alone, one leg thrown over the other keeping the rhythm of the ditty he sings:

*Oh, ‘watch ‘er, catch ‘er,
Jump up in ‘er u-bee-joo;
And if she don’t run off the track
The bums’ll ride ‘er through...*

The Banker will not stay. His feet titter diffidently across the smeared flags, crowding his

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short body with the roly-poly posteriors as close as possible to the wall.

We are fascinated. A group gets off the benches, men nodding significantly one to another. We slide as unostentatiously as possible toward his cell. We mean to pass and investigate.

Back in the dark end sits The Banker, on a corner of his bunk, facing the front. We glimpse him between the thin, flat bars that stand edge-to outside the cylinder of the rotary. Behrens is bold enough to stop. “What’s the matter?” he inquires inside.

A smashed voice comes out. “He, he. It’s so hot out there. I don’t seem to become accustomed to it. He, he. But you men don’t seem to mind it.”

“Think you’re too damned good for us, maybe?”

“Oh, my. Oh, no — no. I wouldn’t have you think that. But you men are more accus... are hardier... You know, I have been ill.”

“Where? Not in here, you ain’t been. You probably think you’re better’n us.”

“Come on away from there, Behrens. What

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do you want to stir him up for? Let him stay in there. He stinks. He’s been in that potlocker three weeks and hasn’t had a bath yet. You’re going out, so you won’t smell him. But I’ll be damned if we want him out there. Not now.”

• • • • •

We forget him for a week. Then one day at exercise he appears among us. The world presents few more revolting sights than that of a luxurious man gone frowsy. The Banker will not undress before anyone, so he does not bathe. He is too nervous to shave, and his beard is going wild. His skin has a sweaty shine, like the skin of a dying halibut. The angelic red mouth insulated with hair hideously invites a kiss.

He has the effeminate man’s shrinking from physical contact with a complete male. Bantas sits down beside him ponderously. The Banker’s flesh contracts inside his clothes and he shivers.

His pallid, beautiful hands have become timid, retreating from his face in a tremor when raised to a touch. They flutter over his plump knees, try to hide in pockets, folds of coat. He drags them back peevishly, over-conscious of them,

like an apologetic father of the unwitting indecencies of his wan children.

“Would you like to have a cigarette?” he asks Bantas.

Why in hell doesn’t he say, “Have a pill?” Bantas never smokes.

“Nobody out here wants yer damn smokes,” sneers Kallich, who has noted the attempt at cheer and come over. He curls his fingers into stiff hooks down the sides of his legs, standing over The Banker.

“I’m sorry. I thought perhaps...

“Well, yer damn wrong.”

“He, he.”

• • • • •

Why has The Banker come to sit with us? Our life is outside the glittering channels of his experience. Our facility in accepting the stupidities of this existence is as far from him as heaven. Whatever flagellations we devise for him we would rather forego. He cramps us, and we retaliate with shamefaced brutalities of speech and action. Better if he had never decided to leave his kennel. We retch with loathing of him, wish him rotting somewhere out of sight.

Does he expect to become one of us? He can’t. He was born wrong.

A newcomer to the federal wing slides onto the bench alongside him.

“What are they going to do on your case?”

“He, he. I have to go away.”

“What do you mean — a stretch?”

The Banker’s hands toddle down his legs toward his knees, trying to explain for their owner that he does not want to answer. The federal pursues, “Did they give you a stretch?”

“My watch — I left it... over there,” The Banker says, rising. He goes to his cell.

“Funny egg,” the federal remarks to Bantas. Then he stretches and slides down onto his spine, with his feet as far out as he can send them. He stares sleepily at the floor and whistles softly.

• • • • •

Every night The Banker dies in his cell and goes to hell, A forest of fists waves at him in front of his door. The fists unfold and grip him, drive great spikes of terror into his soul, crucify his soul on the wall of his counting house.

Then a gilded cart rolls up and he is dumped into it. He rises and cries, “Oh, my — no. This

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is wrong.” The cart slides down a long hill and stops before a gate. He is dragged out and propped up in a throne chair. A dragon with hairy fists growing in rows from its back comes and puffs sewer gas into his face, laughing at him. A gray rat leaps from the dragon’s mouth at him. Imps sit on his shoulders and roll hot gold pieces down his back, searing runnels in his naked hide.

He wakes squealing, and after a while becomes aware that the drilling sound he hears is the clatter of his own teeth. Water drips solemnly in the toilet just

behind his head, trickling away soundlessly into the pool below, around the spindle of the rotary. Rats paddle in the margin of the pool and send up decayed vapors. The Banker lights a cigarette, weeping for the wide, soothing bed at home as he squirms away from the bunk slats that bite his back. He will sleep no more to-night, and the day will not bring peace.

• • • • •

The days and nights have eroded The Banker until his clothes hang slack and wrinkles replace the rondures of his body. Since Kallich pegged

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him we have not seen him until now. In the office a deputy is waiting for the papers. The Banker is off for stir. He is a fear-dazed heap on a bench. The fibers have rotted in him. He is no longer worth cell room.

The deputy comes in with the jailer and signs for The Banker to make ready. The Banker lifts his head. Spots of new moisture show beneath his eyes. He rises painfully and shuffles toward the door.

Goldie sits with his chin in his hand, keyed to the picture. "They might as well start chiselin' a number on a rock for him," he says. "The angels are comin' after him pretty soon."

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XVI

LA PALOMA

SOMEWHERE in Mexican Tom's family, assuredly, was a don of old Castile, probably the handsomest man in the province. Tom's eyes are full and blazing. His brows are fine, curving slightly upward at the outer ends like wing tips. His nose is high and blade-thin and his mouth is smiling, usually. Sometimes it has an acrid turn at the corners. He is made at waist and shoulder on the pattern of perfection.

But depravity is a well-fitted cloak over his tall, wide frame. The charge against him is murder in connection with a robbery, and he has small show. He has robbed another prisoner of a watch here, and with the money from its sale through a friend he has tried to bribe old George to admit him to the girl who is doing it alone in the women's ward. He is a marijuana addict, and stands sometimes throughout the exercise

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hours smoking dreams into the air about his head. We like him.

We like him because he plays the guitar and sings. As often as we can we induce him to sing our favorite, and for days at a time his — *La Paloma*. We are most successful at night, an hour or so before lights-out. He has not sung for three nights, and we hope to hear him tonight. We may fail. He goes to trial in the morning.

"Give us *La Paloma*, Tom," we call across the pen.

“Give us any old thing, Tomas mio, any old thing.”

No answer.

A trusty who has no voice at all walks across the bull-pen trying to sing a new popular air.

“Stow that noise, you rat!” someone shouts at him.

We hear the Negro who cells next Tom on the left ask the Mex for a cigarette.

“Tom... Oh, Tom — get down the old box and give us a song.”

We wait again. Tom takes the guitar off the

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shelf at the back of his cell. We hear the twanging thump as it knocks against something.

“Good boy, Tomas!”

He strikes chords for a few minutes, then sings. His voice is deep and liquid. Training would have made him great. The sob in his tone would drive the women mad. He sings so low at first we can distinguish no words. Then, as we hoped...

Quando sali de la Habana, valgame Dios!

Nadie me ha visto salir si ho fñi yo;

Yiina linda Guachi manga salla voy yo...

Once he sings it, and begins again. The jailhouse falls apart. The moon slides up the sky and we are under a wash of stars in a perfumed night. Behind us are hills, before us the plains...

*Ay! chinita que si,
Ay! qui dame tic amor, ay!
Que vente conmigo chinita a donde...*

He concludes, and after strumming softly

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awhile for himself alone he puts the instrument away.
We ask for no more, but go to bed.

• • • • •

A deputy brings Tom back from court. The trial is over. As soon as Tom is locked into his cell he takes down the guitar. The notes are very gay, and we believe that he has, incredibly, won, and only awaits the release order. He sings:

*Si a tu ventana llega una paloma,
Tratala con cari porqie es mi persona;
Cuentala tus amores bien de mi vida,
Corona de las floras que es cosa mia...*

We call to him, “What was the verdict, Tom?”

“Hijo de punta... geelty...

*Ay! chinita que si,
Ay! qui dame tic amor, ay!...*

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XVII BATTLESHIP

SOFTLY as a mother's benediction, snow falls past the arc lamp before the jailhouse door, tingeing to amethyst as it settles lower. We can see it by pasting our eyes against the square holes in the lattice that surrounds us. "Boy, how'd you like to be out there with that fallin' down your dirty old neck?" Ford asks Gray.

"Be better than this, even if you didn't have a dime," Gray avers sturdily. "Out there there's plenty of dimes, and I'm the little angel can get them. The way I can make a poke is something to watch."

A stud game is announced, and the watchers at the slats turn away. We play for an hour...

*Silent night, holy night,
All is calm, all is bright...*

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Women's voices are before the jailhouse, women's voices in the snow, under the purple arc.

*'Round yon virgin mother and child,
Holy infant so tender and mild...*

"Jesus Christ, ain't that guts!" Masters shouts. "Them's Christmas songs. That's what we're gettin' for Christmas."

We leap from our bunks after Masters' outburst and crowd one another in a line at the lattice, trying for sight of the singers.

*Sleeps in heavenly peace,
Sleeps in heavenly peace.*

Not a man of us has spoken since Masters blazed. The song has washed in at our end through the broken windows, swept on across the bull-pen, up the stairs, blanketing the jailhouse in silence. Men are remembering. If their recollections are pleasant, they are not so for long. Bitterness soon puckers the atmosphere to cracking.

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"Who the hell said there ain't no Santy Claus?" a ribald voice cries from the rotary. "Listen! He brought us a whole church-house!"

That cry is a trigger-pull, releasing every man from the memories he did not want.

"Let's answer 'em," another voice calls across the bull-pen. "Give 'em *Pie in the Sky*." This is a song a wayfaring wobbly left in the place. It has lived partly as a memento of the man and partly as an expression of revolt as a factor in civilization.

Holy preachers come out every night...

The rotary begins it and we take it up:

Try to tell you what's wrong and what's right.

Up the wall and in behind the women's ward others
fall in:

*'Til they get all your coin on the drum;
Then they tell you when you're on the bum:*

Every man who knows even the tune sets to

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on the refrain, swelling a chorus that forces the carols
back and out again at the windows:

*You will eat
(You will eat)
Bye and bye,
(Bye and bye,)
In that glorious land above the sky;
(Above the sky;)*

*Work and pray,
(Oh, work and pray,)
Live on hay
(And live on hay) —
You'll get pie in the sky when you die.*

“Damned well done, men,” an approving basso booms. “Now, give ’em another. We can sing, too. Give ’em *God’s Whiskers*. That’s good for Christmas.”

The women in the street, undismayed, stand in the dreaming drift of the snow and sing, their voices blurring in the antiphon we hurl at them.

We in the federal wing march to this one, beating
out the accents with our feet on the

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rattling steel floor plates. Those elsewhere, who are
too cramped to march, pound with cups, loose bunks,
shoes.

Old God dresses down his whiskers with a comb,
Old God dresses down his whiskers with a
comb,
Old God dresses down his whiskers with a comb,
Then He goes to see His gal.

Up and down the raucous corridors we go, at full
throat. All over the place men are trying to bulge the
walls with the power of their lungs.

“Boys! Boys!” a new voice calls from the bull-pen.
Silence clamps down on us like a huge inverted
bucket. The sheriff is with us. “Boys, what is all this
noise about? Can’t you be decent to-night and let these
women sing?”

“Send ’em in, sheriff, and we’ll play with ’em.” The
joker is around on the back side of the rotary, calling
out of darkness. The sheriff could sooner become
president than learn whose is the proposal. He ignores
it and asks again, “Can’t you be decent to decent
women? They

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came as a special favor to me, because I told them you
would like to have them.”

From below us a federal: "When did we get so thick that you and us like the same things, sheriff? Send those dames somewhere else."

"They'll stay right here and sing, and you'll like it." The sheriff is angry now. "Any more of that noise and you'll go hungry to-morrow."

"We'll go hungry anyway, you belly-robbin' bastard," someone shrieks at him. "We always go hungry in this dump."

The sheriff is losing. He opens the door to the office. "No more noise now, remember that." He leaves us.

The women have made half the circuit of our home. The men in the rotary, celling in their coffin-shaped spaces, are not organized for singing, so they boo, curse, stomp the steel, as soon as the women start the next song. Then, inevitably, the bolder ones shout bawdy suggestion, invitation. The women give it up and leave.

Back comes the sheriff, with news. "I had a great dinner all fixed for you boys, but now you don't get it. And you will have no visitors tomorrow. And if you make any more noise I

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am going to see that you are punished with more than that."

"My, my, lis'en to de sheriff," a silken Negro voice jeers. "He's gettin' mean, sure 'nough. My, my, what a ha'd man dat man is."

"Listen, sheriff, I didn't make no noise, and I got to see my wife to-morrow. My kid's sick."

This recreant protest is beaten down with hoots and curses. “Wait ’til you get in the bullpen again. You’ll look so God damn bad after that your wife’ll want me.”

Out in the pen the sheriff wanders about, alone and inept, stretching his neck at the cells up the wall, at the upper deck of the rotary, over toward our wing. He is baffled more by spirit than by numbers. “I’ve warned you, now. One more song or any more stomping and you get no Christmas dinner.” He is gone.

“Well,” The Swede calls from his cell on the wall, “does he get away with it?”

“He does like hell,” is the laconic answer. “Give ’em *County Jail*. We all know that one.”

*Oh, such a set of villains,
The like you never saw—*

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*Murderers and every kind
Of breakers of the law:*

*They sang a song the whole night long,
Their curses fell like hail...*

We sing it through and stop with a roar that is ample period to the night’s fun.

• • • • •

And to-day is Christmas. At dinner time a trusty shouts, “Come and get it.”

We mill around the slot as the pans of food are shoved through.

“Spareribs and kraut. Ain’t that swell!”

“What the hell did you expect — ostrich hips?”

“What’s the others gettin’?”

“Same thing,” the trusty answers.

“Well, who the hell cares — in this can? Christmas is just a snowy day in December in here.”

Yet when we try for lightness and ease as we eat our meal we lack sparkle. The kraut is sodden and the fat of the meat chokes us. Resentment last night was one thing. Resentment today is another. Last night it had something

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to feed on. To-day there is kraut. Last night we were wanton, but we felt wantonness our right. To-day we would be more tame, but are forced away from our desire. All right. If that is the way the sheriff feels about it...

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We are not denied the bull-pen. There the sheriff erred. We are at a plot. We shall pay the sheriff out with noise for last night’s carols and for to-day’s bad food. Fires light thus easily behind the shelter of restraint. We shall build the sheriff and the town a battleship, with all its accompaniment of sound.

Those of us who have had experience of what we intend confide to each other our hope that the sheriff will not come in and by his presence touch off the hotheads. We lie about, talking, reading newspapers, playing cards. Off in the rotary someone tweaks a mandolin and hums. Black Ed has sung his deep song

and Sundown, too stupid even for fear, has whined his lay and is chattering with the man in the next cell.

All but a few of the prisoners have control of the lamps in their cells. In peace times we muffle the bulbs, that we may not go blind. Tonight

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at nine we dim the jailhouse to the lamp in the bull-pen and three others scattered on the walls and beyond us. But in the dark we strip off the paper shades before we lie down — in our clothes. Modern warfare demands some theatricals. We shall have ours.

• • • • •

*For Jesus Christ, the Savior,
Was born on Christmas day...*

• • • • •

Stirring in the wing precedes the outbreak. Down on the lower deck one man says to another, “Don’t seem like the right way to put in this night, does it — even for eggs like us?”

“Losin’ your guts?” the other asks.

“Aw, go to hell.”

• • • • •

“Lights up, men! Twelve o’clock!” Masters calls. “Then off and give ’em the works.”

The blare of the unshaded bulbs smacks us like sleet in a level wind.

“An’ don’t forget,” Masters shouts from our wing to the rest of the jail, “it’s us an’ then you, fifty-fifty, twenty-minute watches.”

“Right; let’s go.”

• • • • •

The jailhouse opens on the snow-muted midnight square eyes more bright than all the stars that ever shone over Bethlehem. They look a long look, then snap shut. Behind the dead eyes noise awakes:

Br-r-r-o-o-o, br-r-r-o-o-o-m... Br-r-r-o-o-o, br-r-r-o-o-o-m... Br-r-r-o-o-o, br-r-r-o-o-o-m... “Spareribs and kraut.”... Br-r-r-o-o-o, br-r-r-o-o-o-m.

“Step it up, men — faster!”

Br-r-o-o, br-r-o-o-m... Br-r-o-o, br-r-o-o-m... Br-r-o-o, br-r-o-o-m...

A monstrous diapason of sound is hammered out on the anvil of hate, jumping the jailhouse on its foundation. Doors, beds, buckets beat against steel. Naked flesh flails the loose ventilator covers making triangles in the corners of the cells. The flesh swells, bursts, squirting blood.

“Tear the God damned place wide open!” leaps from a frenetic throat.

“Tear it open!” is the response.

Thunder drums quicken in the steel, rolling

sound in jet streams through every crevice of our keep. Mania swings the mallets.

“Faster, men!”

Broo, broom... Broo, broom... Broo, broom... Broo, broom... Broo, broom... Blend of a thousand metal-wrought sounds beats in the heart of the jailhouse. Broo, broom... Broo, broom... Broo,

broom... A fist is a rivet gun. Weakened flesh absorbs sound, strengthens, gives sound back magnified. Screams coruscate up and down through the deeper volume.

“Come on in, sheriff, the kraut’s workin’!”

“Two minutes more, men, then rest.”

We batter out the finale in crescendo and stagger away from the steel to the lamps. “Lights one minute, then out.” More theatricals.

In the white shriek of the lights we look one at another. Lungs gulp air horribly, soughing with effort.

“Out lights! Out!”

Someone holds time on us with a watch. “All right, go!”

The men swing into the work steadily now.

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The first assault has taught coordination, efficiency.

Up to the roof the sound rises, bellowing in a tangle of keys, caroms off the walls, and down again. A hell’s addition is poured into it.

“Grab it up, rotary; get into it! No lights!”

This fever will build better from here in darkness.

The rotary roars like all Africa’s percussion heads in one. One man is raising the end of his hundred-pound bunk and walking out from under it. All the windows clatter when it drops. Another beats a swift demon tattoo on the bottom of a bucket with a shoe. Men are bawling, howling, cursing great jagged curses made for the moment. One has lost the use of his members and screams at top note, with his throat

strung tight as lightning. If any one is idle — no matter. Our force is sufficient.

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Suddenly, outside, clangor and shouting surround us.

“They’ve brought the fire engines — wait! No lights!”

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We stop, to watch. In two streets we see hose dragged from its racks. We wait.

“Stop it or you get the water,” a huge voice warns.

We wait, quivering.

“You can’t turn it on, you lice; you’ll wash this old dump away.”

True. We catch it up, altering it.

“Go ahead and open ’em! Go on. You’ll knock the walls in. Open ’em up, you rats. Go on, let’s have it.”

“Go ’round and turn it in the sheriff’s coffee tub. He’ll pay you for it.”

“Come on, men, they won’t do it. Let’s go, all together!”

Br-r-r-o-o-o, br-r-r-o-o-o-m... Br-r-o-o, br-r-o-o-m... Broo, broom... Broo, broom... ...We beat off the red trucks with a monsoon din. Tides of furious sound roll away from us over half the city. We sweat and tremble with the power of our exertion. Nascent weakness prods our fury.

“Lights two minutes. Then rest five. We’ll double up for the last one, and make it long.”

The lamps sicken us now. We fall into the

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bunks. Rusty dust we have raised is mixed with the sweat. Matted hair falls over dirty foreheads, into burnt eyes. Blackie has torn his arm and twists a ligature of blanket above the elbow.

“Douse lights” is called just as the old night jailer appears in our wing, a beaten bird in the storm. He is futile as sympathy. We snap off the lamps and he stumbles down the stairs to the lower deck.

“All right about the noise, boys, but if any of you tries to break out I’ll have to shoot.”

“Go shoot yourself, buzzard; we’re busy.”

Back up the stairs he climbs, to tack away across the bull-pen toward the rotary.

“All right, bullies, here it goes!”

We start well, but our strength is gone. The voice of the steel falters, recovers, swells and holds, then falls again. Again it leaps upward, and an encouraging shout is raised. “Come on, men, don’t let ’em think we’re done. Give ’em one more big one.”

We try, whipping our flesh to the task. Another brief hurricane swoops out over the city. Then the stuttering flesh goes dumb and the night comes back to its quiet.

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“Look out there at all them houses lit up. Boy, we woke ’em.”

“Where the hell was the sheriff all that time?”

“In bed with his head under the covers.”

• • • • •

Peace on earth, good will toward men...

• • • • •

We have been childish. We have been at war. What is more childish than war?... “I don’t like you any more. Therefore I’ll blast your head off. I’ll dynamite your carcass up among the stars and watch it fall back in pieces, splashing. They’ll give me a shiny medal...” We were attacked with spareribs and kraut, and have countered.

Into bed we tumble in our sweaty lather, to sleep.

• • • • •

*God rest you, merry gentlemen,
May nothing you dismay...*

XVIII

INEBRIATE

AS always, the guards, excepting the marshal, are noisy and domineering. They fuss so much to keep up courage. The effort is needless, for we are too wasted for great fight.

We are to be moved to the bighouse now. Our cells in the bighouse are waiting for us. The order came at nine, when breakfast was served. Now it is ten. We had an hour in which to make ready, so we had forty-five minutes to spare.

No one knows what the weather is this day. We have lived semi-subterraneously for the last three months of our stay here. The bottoms of the windows are at street level, but are above the level of our eyes. The panes are so begrimed we cannot see through them. The windows have not been opened during the three months. Beyond them the year cried and died and we did not see. No breath of autumn came in, and no

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breath of winter. The seasons might alter their order, and a man living here would not know it.

“Two and two by the legs, Matt,” the chief guard orders the attachment of leg irons. Our hands will be free to carry what we have, a bundle of shaving tools or a shirt, which will be kept for us until the bighouse lets us free. One thing all will carry — the hope that the bighouse will be less foul than this place is. But it

will be more roomy, and the turnover of boarders will be heavier and more interesting.

“Now line up and we’ll check you out,” the chief says. We are in the office. The old relief jailer, like a bad-tempered goblin, sits on the stool before his desk and frowns. But pleasure at being rid of us moves his lips in and out between his denuded gums, and soon he grins at us silently for a moment, then breaks into a low, quavering chuckle.

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“Kerry, Seagrove, Brandt, Callahan, Russell, Ford, Lindstrom...” We answer. One answers, “Here, you old louse, and glad to be going.” The grin slides off the old man’s face. He is not a trusting old man.

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We number fifteen. One will have a guard for companion. He curses steadily, like a monk telling his beads.

“What’s the matter, ain’t I as good to walk with as anybody else?” His certainty that he is not is in the guard’s tone. “I’d rather walk with a leper,” the man answers. And after a pause, “Or anything that’s not as rotten as you.”

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We have not yet seen the day, nor caught the odor of it, not even here in the checking office, with only the door between us and the world. This den was built tightly against everything but memory.

Back in the cage the single carbon light glows in the steel ceiling, glows as it seems resentfully, like a heart muffled with evil. Beneath it faces flicker and

fade, flicker and fade, flicker and fade, as the other prisoners pass around in a circle for exercise. They will have more room now.

“All right, all of you, we’ll get on out o’ here now. Keep in that line just like you are.” The guards distribute themselves. Each is careful to let us know he is armed. There is something

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childish in this. The room is short and the line curls into a knot at the rear, guards and prisoners jammed together.

The man who is to walk with the guard turns to the jailer. “Well, old son of a bitch, I’ll see you in hell.” The jailer steps backward toward his desk as if lightning struck near him. He catches at a grin, and misses. Then he turns and bends over his book, and does not look up again.

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The marshal throws open the door. Clean sunlight reflected from new-fallen snow hurtles so hard into the room that the men at the head of the line gasp. We move out. The light smashes our eyes shut. Our nostrils contract and stick as if glued, until our mouths are forced open. Small, stinging pain assails our lungs. One man pants as if he has just finished a hard run.

As those at the rear come through, one exclaims, “Jesus! Jesus! What a morning!”

Each puff of wind sends down a small storm of snow from the trees. One man as he goes under a branch holds up his face quickly to catch the falling flakes on it. One totters, then

another, and a third and fourth. One laughs giddily, and soon all are laughing. The plumes of white breath in the air grow shorter and more frequent.

The line is disarranged. Some of the prisoners skip, two and two, kicking the snow into fan shapes ahead of their feet. Two run a few steps and then double over and laugh on a higher note, rattling the leg irons in a choppy rhythm.

“Hey, stand still a minute,” the chief orders. “What the hell’s got into you? Are you all nuts, or is this one more of your bum stunts?” With one exception we laugh aloud. The one is laughing too hard to make a sound. At length, overcome, he sits hard into the snow, almost dragging down the man who is ironed to him. He bends forward over his folded arms and waggles his head foolishly. When he looks up, tears are running in the gutters around the corners of his mouth.

• • • • •

“Come on, now, get up. We got just twenty minutes to get to that train,” the marshal commands. The chief says, “Straighten up, all o’ you, or I’ll... He goes silent before the

knowledge that he can do nothing, and therefore needn’t threaten. We form a kind of line again and go forward. We are still but a few hundred yards from the jail, in a quiet side street. Lindstrom sings in a strained voice:

*O-o-h hear that mighty rumble:
Chicago train's on time,
Goin' like the very Jesus
On the Pennsylvania line...*

The lungs begin to feel easier now, and the frothiness is passing off from our brains. Gradually the line goes silent excepting for the chatter of the leg irons and the crunch of the snow. A guard coughs. We realize we have been drunk, and regret that our blood will soon swing through us evenly again.

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In the train we shall sit in silence and stare at the whited countryside. The other passengers will sit whispering and stare at us. Later they will stretch at ease in their berths. We shall remain sitting in our seats.

BIGHOUSE

*'Where have you been so long, Johnny boy?
Where have you been so long?
Been to the pen and I'm going back again—
That's where I've been so long.*

I BIGHOUSE

THIS is the best bighouse in the country you're goin' to," the marshal tells us, slowly lifting and drooping his big head for emphasis. We are in the washroom. The guards have removed the leg irons and have stowed them in a bag, from which first they took handcuffs. One cuff has been snapped onto a wrist of each of us while we wash. "So we get new laundry this morning, marshal?" one of the men asks. Our eyes are scalded from sleeping-waking erect in our seats through the night, and our minds are mazy. "They'll treat you right in there, believe me," the slow marshal adds to complete his compliment.

"Say," Burns turns to him, "quit yappin' and tell me this: Why couldn't you wait 'til you could get us some bunks in a train before you started instead of draggin' us out in seats? This

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may be a swell dump up here, but there ain't no particular hurry to get there, is there?"

"I got orders," the marshal answers. "And besides, I got to get this over with and make another trip. I can't do things like people Eke you'd like to have 'em done. Come on, shine, and stop sloppin' that water, we'll be gettin' off in ten minutes," he tells the black boy at the washbowl.

"Yeah?" the boy replies. "Ain't that jus' fine!"

Outside the opaque, rugose washroom windows an innuendo of dawn blows mistily past the fleeing train. It is the pensive time before day that bleeds the mind of everything but reflection and makes a man wonder why he waited through the night.

Four prisoners sit on a leather seat, crowded into bundles of discomfort. The others stand with the guards at one side and in the door and the black boy before the mirror slowly mops his short face with the pushed-out eyes. He peers at himself, holding the towel below his chin as if it were a communion cloth. "Ole missus," he bespeaks his reflection, "ole missus, you boy

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sho in a hell of a fix now. He goin' de bighouse, ole missus. Man heah say hit's a nice place. Hit may be so, but hit's de bighouse. Bighouse ain't no playhouse." He mops his face again, covering his eyes, dabbing at them.

A passenger, fuzzed with sleep, comes in with an elaborate traveling kit in his hands. "Come on, shine, get away from that bowl now," orders the marshal. The Negro has angered him with his slowness. "Come on out, all of you," he growls at the men in the seat.

In the narrow corridor outside, handcuffs are snapped onto our free wrists under the chief's guidance. The train surges into the restraint of its air brakes and lunges back as the brakes are released. They are applied again and the train retards. Mason bangs an elbow against the washroom wall and curses so loudly in pain that the passenger inside thrusts out

his mussed head and looks at us. He wishes to ask the marshal about us, but his morning nerves break up his desire. He disappears.

“Stand where you are,” says the marshal, “she’ll stop in a minute.” In a minute she does. We alight, tumbling out like ugly bugs from a

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hollow log, into the puny light seeping through an overhang of cloud. The weather has scummed. “It’s a right morning for a murder, brother,” Mason informs the guard beside him. “If I had a gun I’d blow you up — for fun.” Nothing Mason says now can be held against him. Mason is on his way to the bighouse.

The snow of yesterday has not been here. An older fall lies in wornout patches in the ditch across the tracks from the station. We look swiftly all about, but the high walls we expected are not in sight. “Make a line,” we are ordered. “You got a walk to make. Snap it up and you’ll get your breakfast earlier.”

We drill past the station and turn onto a sodden road that goes over a hill. Full day is up, as full as it can be under the sky bellied with moisture.

“It might snow and it might rain,” a guard observes, peaking his eyes upward.

“You’re a smart boy,” Janicek tells him. “You’re wastin’ your time in this racket. You ought to be drivin’ a honey-cart somewhere.”

“Shut up an’ get in that line,” the guard bawls, so loudly the marshal looks a question

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back from the head of the file. “I’ll rap you to the warden for any more of your gab,” he closes.

“Yeh, I know,” Janicek answers. “You will anyway, you scut.”

We march quietly then toward the top of the hill. The road slips from under our feet and mud splashes. The handcuffs force us to carry our hands in front of us and we cannot balance against a skid. We look like a group of praying pilgrims. We are on a pilgrimage, true. But we have mislaid our prayers somewhere in the years.

“There she is, boys,” the marshal calls from the head of the hill. He is light humored again, now that the end of his trek is near. He is as gay as a mariner up from the Horn when he raises the landfall that is home.

The line stops. If each guard had an open knife at the back of a prisoner, yet would the line stop. A quarter of a mile ahead and slightly below us on the right is the bighouse — three long walls and two short ones, with the stone facade of the administration building to fill the gap between the short sections. The entire structure is hammered low in the pewter light,

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as if trying to hide in the earth. The red bricks of the walls and the stone of the façade are dark in the day. The place seems a fiction created from the imaginings of the dazed night in the train and the distorting light of this morning.

We stand, and look. Each prisoner’s eyes widen for more light. They focus into his memory this picture

from the hilltop. In the after years each will lose interest in his photograph. But he will keep it.

“And that’s where they treat you right, is it, marshal?” Burns asks. “How’d you like to do my stretch, if it’s so damn nice?”

This snaps-to the shutters. The photographs are complete.

The Negro says again, “Ole missus, you black son sho in a hell of a fix now.” He walks a few steps, then dirges—

*Cain’t do no dicin’, gal—
Don’ you raise no row—
Cain’t do no lovin’:
In de bighouse no-ow...*

• • • • •

Open and shut swing the great metal gates,

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and we are in. “Sain’ Petuh, heah we is!” exclaims the Negro. The heavy lock clicks and he glances back, once.

“Shut up, all of you, and take off your hats,” a prison guard orders us.

Immediate chill strikes us. We are in a corridor white and hard, as if built of ice. It is unusually high vaulted. Oppression clamps down on us as we walk toward the office. Silent men in prison gray move trepidly along the corridor, huddling to the walls. The middle of the way is for the officials and the guards. Far ahead, past the office door, a light-lane bisects the

corridor and suppresses the section beyond it to deep gray.

“Keep still when we get in here,” the marshal advises, “or you’ll get off on the wrong foot. This place is all right if you act right.”

This will be dwelling many years for some of us, so we hold to silence. We have learned adaptability of the harder kind. We shall try to play smart marbles in here.

We are recorded in the office. Then we are herded down to the lane of light and out onto a bricked street. Each man looks across the wide

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yard at the wall. From outside on the hilltop it was low, suggesting to muscles up, over and out. Now we are in a deep cistern. Behind us two cell-houses build an acute angle of height above our heads.

Two prison runners have attached themselves to our group. One is a shrewd looking little Negro whose prison uniform has been tailored for him and recently has come smoothly creased from under an iron. The other is a white convict of about forty-five who looks at us wearily from large mild eyes. They escort us to the hospital, where the marshal and his men leave us in care of three prison guards.

We wonder about breakfast.

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On the Sunday after, we view our fellows. Here are men. Here is every nuance of lust, every gradation of defeat, each walking on its hind legs upright in the sun, with numbers printed black and large on its back. We are from every economic plane and from most of the

countries of the world. Here we are, and we wish we were not. Some of us are so far forgot that when we die we shall be buried in the

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little graveyard just outside the walls. No family and no friend will call for the shell, and the weird, unknowable parent, the state, that sent the living thing here for punishment will have to take the dead thing and hole it away out of the sun.

Janicek and Burns and Mason sit with some others of us in a circle at the root of a building. We try to overcome the pull of the wall on our eyes.

“That’s a high wall,” Mason says. He seems more elemental than ever he has seemed to us before, as if his months in jail and his days here have washed out of him all of his memories excepting the memory of freedom. He looks at each of us, then looks away, across the yard. “That’s a high wall.”

“Yeh,” a vic answers him.

“I didn’t think it’d be so high.”

“No... Well, it is.”

“It is partly your physical condition that makes the wall seem so high, men,” a low, calm, unusually warm voice tells us. We look up. Behind Mason stands a tall man with a large, intelligently placid face. His hair is a fine, white

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drift over his big head. His eyes are blue, and have in them the light that comes only from a constantly glowing nature. “Partly your physical condition.”

Mason twists around to see the man fully. “Yeh?” he asks. “How d’you figure it?”

“You’ve been some time in jail, haven’t you?”

“A hell of a long time,” Burns interrupts.

“Then your vision has been very limited. You have looked only at walls that were near your eyes. Does the yard seem very wide to you?”

“Yeh,” Mason and Burns answer together. Janicek is puzzled.

“The wall seems high for the same reason. Your eyes will refocus later on. I hope they will.”

“How’d you know we just come in?” Janicek asks. He shapes his face into a knot of angry doubt.

“By your numbers.”

We look at the numbers across the knees of our gray trousers. There are five digits. On the tall man’s knees are but four.

“Jesus, you’re the guy that built the place, ain’t you?” queries Janicek.

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“Not quite that. I’ve seen many come, though. And many go.” His words make a statement in which is no regret. “I thought you might permit me to tell you a few simple things about the institution.”

“That means dump,” Burns waggishly informs us. “Go ahead. Sit down an’ rest your hocks.” The tall man sits with us. He disposes his legs with care. “But I shall not stay long enough to tire you,” he smilingly informs a little vic who looks at him wryly. “First,” he begins, “know this — The officials here depend heavily on the informers, the stool pigeons. So the best

thing to say of your desires and your plans is nothing. That is the best method. Then the man who would carry tales about you will have to invent the tales. Invention is difficult.” He takes out pipe and tobacco and loads the pipe slowly as he talks. “Second — If you have money, much money, you may not have to stay here long. But do not take my word for it, nor expect me to advise you how to proceed. Only this: I said money, not influence.”

“You’re a great help,” says Janicek. He kicks his heels into the cinders.

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“You are in; perhaps you can get out,” our informant tells him, but handsomely.

“Naw,” Janicek grins, “it’s all right. I ain’t got a dime.”

“Third — If a guard reports you for breaking rules, state your case to the deputy warden without making fables. And of course do not involve anyone else. The deputy uses informers, but he despises them.” He takes the match Burns offers, lights his pipe, and scans us closely.

“Those three bits may help you.” He smiles. “We have a fair library here. If I can help any of you find the books you want, ask me.” He rises and walks away, trailing pale blue smoke.

“Now whaddyu make o’ that?” asks Janicek. “Think ’e’s wrong?”

“No, he’s all right,” says a vic who has come up from another group. “That’s Will. He takes care of the library. Everybody knows him. He’s as straight as they

make 'em. Doin' it all, too. Been in here since he was a punk."

"That's pretty good what he said about if you have lots o' jack." Burns laughs as he says it, but the laugh has barbs in it. "Say," he asks the newcomer, "what's the payoff from this dump?"

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"A fin, a bull-wool suit, a pair o' kicks every dick in the country can tell a mile away an' a ducket back to wherever you come up from."

"Damn... just like Christmas. What're you supposed to do with the fin — buy a new front and a new heater?"

"Brother, you ain't supposed to do nothin' with 'em. You're supposed to cut another caper quick as you can so the mugs'll have somethin' to do chasin' you. After you been in one o' these dumps once there's a big chance you'll be in some more of 'em. They'll take them numbers off'n you when you go out, but they'll leave somethin' else on that'll never come off. There ain't a real dick goin' that can't spot you after you lay up a few years in one o' these places. This's my second hitch, and I'm here on a frame, so I know. If they can't stick you straight, they'll frame you. So there you are." Anger leaps redly into his face as he turns away.

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Thus it is, then.

We rise and break into small groups. After we walk onto the wide spread of the cinders we pass a quartette of Negroes. They are singing

softly, as if afraid to be heard. But as their song ends, they laugh. “ ’At’s bearin’ down on ut!” one shouts. “Le’s go again.” They lean their black heads together. Their arms chain their shoulders in an easy square.

“A cell-block seems like the old home to them babies,” a vic remarks. “Shines has it tough, though.”

“So there you are,” Mason says, remembering.

And Burns, “Aw, can it... What the hell!”

II CHAMPION

GREASY'S a good guy, even if they do say a lot o' dirt about 'im," Judy insists to The Chaw. They are detailing, with a view to their final and accurate determination, the virtues and the flaws of the champion.

"Lis'n, you talk like one o' these hops when they're charged up. No guy that cops a plea is a good guy, an' Greasy copped. An' I don't think 'e's so damn tough, either."

"The hell 'e ain't! Wod 'e do las' year? Trims the best middle in the dump, don't 'e? An' wod 'e do the year before? Just takes 'imself a heavy, is all. An' 'e was a good heavy." Indignation is Judy's part. "I s'pose you're goina tell me Mucker wasn' a good heavy?"

"Yeh, sure, 'e takes The Mucker. An' who was The Mucker? An old stiff wid a gimpy leg an' old enough to be Greasy's old man.

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There's a heavy for yu!" The Chaw picks up a chip of rock and slams it against a broken gravestone to accent his anger. "That's the heavy Greasy takes. Any welter could do it. The Mucker dies less 'n' a year after the fight — from old age."

"Well, how about Regan? I s'pose Regan was poor too, hunh? Was Regan a ringer or was 'e good? Tell me that."

“You act like you didn’ see the battle.”

“Sure I seen it. So what?”

“So *what*? Well, didn’ Greasy foul um an’ then clout um out?”

“Aw, nuts, Chaw, you know damn well Greasy never fouled Regan. What’d Regan say? Said ’e wasn’ sure. Ain’t that right? Well, was you ever fouled? Did you ever feel all your guts draggin’ down in the bottom o’ your belly an’ makin’ you so sick you couldn’ see? If you’re fouled you don’ need nobody to tell you about it. You’ll know all about it without anybody tellin’ you about it.”

“All right, we’ll let it go that ’e’s as good as they make ’em wid ’is mitts. But ’e copped a plea, an’ that lets um out far’s I’m concerned.”

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“What the hell if ’e did cop, ’e didn’ hurt nobody. ’E was on the rap alone, wasn’t ’e? It’s dif’erent if a hook is on a rap with a mob. Greasy even put up ’is own fall-money. An’ ’is mouthpiece makes ’im for the iron an’ lays ’im flat. ’E was goin’ over anyway, so why shouldn’ ’e cop? ’E didn’ get no more for it, did ’e?”

“Aw, to hell wid um. I ain’t bettin’ a bag on um an’ I hope this new bird mashes ’is mouth off!” is The Chaw’s desire.

We shift our positions on the rejected building stones and grave decorations outside the stone shop and await whatever shall be. None of the others has a brief prepared. Accretions to the outer edge of the Sunday crowd have enlarged it. The sitters can see

only a shifting blur of faces where the farthest ring of standing vics listens.

“What’s the new guy’s name?” an old vic with red hair asks.

“Plug — somethin’. Don’t know what his last name is,” he is answered.

“Yeh, I hope ’e mashes ’is mouth off. Greasy’s a louse,” The Chaw adds. He counts himself

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victor of the joust, and his last words are a flourish of the pennon.

Greasy, from the rim of the crowd, has heard everything. He elbows through to the center and stands over The Chaw. “On you feet, tinhorn!” he commands. “That last crack’s the one I don’ like.” The Chaw looks up. His face is tarnished with worry. “On you feet!” Greasy orders again. The Chaw stands, twitching with fear.

“I was only kiddin’,” he pleads.

“Sure, I know,” Greasy answers. “We all like to kid once in a while.” He bows his neck and looks from under his brows into The Chaw’s eyes, which try to escape. “Sure, I know. Now I tell you what you do, just to show the boys you was kiddin’. You stand up on that rock and tell ’em you’re a louse. Say it out like that: ‘I’m a louse.’ ”

“Aw, hell, Greasy, I was only kiddin’, honest,” The Chaw whines.

“Sure, I know. Well, get up on the rock and tell the gang you’re a louse.” He steps closer to The Chaw and

buckles his left arm for a drive. "Get up, tinhorn, or I'll knock your lugs

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off." He swings his shoulders in a feint and The Chaw climbs the rock.

"I'm a louse," he says swiftly, mumbling it. He moves to come down off the rock.

"Now say it again, slow, so they can all hear it," Greasy says, shoving him back.

The Chaw straightens again. "I'm a louse."

The crowd bawls ironic acclaim and The Chaw comes off his rostrum. "You won't bet a bag," Greasy sneers. "Of course you won't. You're a tinhorn and ain't got a bag to bet. How many stamps was it you stole, a dollar's worth or a dime's worth? Sure you won't bet a bag."

The Chaw walks away, picking his footing with extravagant care among the broken stones. Greasy stands with hands on hips and looks after him and grins.

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They fight in a few days, on the Fourth. None of us knows the challenger, who has been with us only a week. He brought with him a record. If it is meager, still it is a better record than any of the other vics has disclosed. We have seen him, and are agreed he could look better

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and yet not frighten Greasy. He has been swinging a maul in the stone shop, and his mates say he is weak.

Greasy is not for himself our beloved. He is a stool pigeon suspect. The only lower form of prison vermin is the stool pigeon known. He does not need a guide in the ring, though, and for that all of us who can have laid our tobacco on him. He has not failed us in twice out. We have bet so much tobacco on him for this fight that there are no more takers. Those who delayed placing have had to go on the preliminaries.

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Greasy goes through the first round slowly. He wastes time whacking the air. Once he jabs a long left into Plug's mouth. Plug takes it going away but shows bloodied lips to the end of the round. Greasy has blasting powder in that left. Plug is taller and outreaches Greasy, but his distance is bad, and also he hurries himself.

"It's Greasy all the way!" the vics whoop, ignoring the slowness.

"How's 'e work?" we ask Greasy as we swab his head and limber his calves. He is breathing easily and seems strong.

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"That guy'll fool you," Greasy says. "He's a fox."

"You're dumb," Pacelli answers. "He's got nothin' a-tall. Just keep away from him this round an' then in the next get inside an' take his gut. He'll fold up like a whore's bed."

Heat reverberates between the walls and the stare of the sun on the white canvas of the ring blinks our eyes. The vics on the stands have pulled open their shirts and are wearing their caps low on their noses. Over the

west wall shines a gray thunderhead in a white turban. The gong calls.

Greasy feints with his left and Plug leads into it. He lacks snap, but smacks Greasy's wet head above the ear. They both pull off and flail the hot air. Greasy works in and looses his left upward along Plug's ribs. Plug pulls away. Greasy follows and Plug halts him with a pair of lefts in the middle.

"Slow as snails!" Pacelli says. "Greasy acts like he never had a mitt on before."

Greasy spansks Plug on the neck. Pain twists Plug's face. The vics approve clamorously.

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"Take him, Greasy, and let's get out of this heat."

Plug circles, holding his fives low and wide open. Greasy follows him in a half crouch. Plug unwinds and places a left hard on Greasy's ribs and braces the blow with a right half uppercut to the chin. Greasy's head snaps back and Plug hooks to the solar. Greasy is too slow to stop him. The bell calls them off.

"Say, what the hell do you want to do — let that clown win?" Pacelli asks angrily. "He's as weak as a cat and you let him handle you like you was a pushover."

"This heat's gettin' me," Greasy explains. He flops back against the ring posts and rolls his head as if he is suffering. We soak him down and slap his biceps and calves. Someone on the tier of seats behind us bawls, "What're yu doin', champion, throwin' it?" Greasy rolls his head again.

The next round slugs along indifferently until Plug corks the champion in the solar and crosses his right fair to the chin. Greasy topples and the vics on the seats come to their feet and howl. The soldier refereeing works up to eight before

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Greasy hauls himself onto his feet again. Plug wobbles in, misses a swing to Greasy's head and blocks Greasy's hook to the middle. Greasy pulls away and Plug lets him have a left and a right on the chin. Greasy crumbles down as if his bones have liquefied. "You are a louse!" a vic screeches. "By God, The Chaw was right!" The crowd accepts it. "Louse! Louse! Louse!" it shouts, beating feet on the boards. Greasy comes to his feet at nine. Plug's feet fumble as he comes across the ring to meet the arisen. Greasy sticks out his left. Plug brushes it away and sinks a pair of lefts into Greasy's solar and then knocks him over with a long right to the jaw. It looks too easy. The referee begins the count, but the bell rings.

Fury puts a stutter into Pacelli's speech. "Why the hell don't you... Say, what the hell is this — a sellout?"

Greasy lifts straight up on his stool and says, "Kick in the rag, I ain't goin' in any more."

"I'll kick in no rag, you yellow bastard. You're goin' in an' like it!"

"I'm not goin' in. Throw in the rag."

"Aw, you don't mean it, Greasy. That gang's

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countin' on you." Pacelli sweeps the vics with his arm.

“Throw in the rag, or I’ll throw it in myself.”

“You louse, you’re quittin’!”

“Throw in the rag. Sure, I know.”

Pacelli snatches the big gray towel from the swinger and tosses it to the center of the ring in an arc of contempt. Then swiftly he hauls the sponge from the water bucket, draws his right arm far back, and snaps the sponge hard into Greasy’s face. “You dirty louse!”

Hurriedly the guards draw a tight line between the vics and the ring. The vics are on their feet, bristling with threat. We climb down onto the yard. Greasy sits alone on his stool in the ring as we are herded out with the others.

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To-night a note is circulating in each cellhouse. It reads:

“Sure, I let the guy win. The reason is because my time is up before Labor Day and the guy was in jail with only slum to eat ten months before he come up here. I eat on the hospital mess all that time and he was not in shape. I

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got plenty money waiting for me for when I go out and I will send in more tobacco than you lost. Somebody else can fight the guy on Labor Day. If any guy don’t like it and wants to meet me where the screws can’t see us just let me know.

Greasy John E. Fallon.”

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III

STORM

LOOK at that pot-belly herd them dames,” The Red Miller suggests from his trough behind us. “A rooster with the hens’s got nothin’ on that guy.” We look across the width of the yard and up the brick street past the hospital. The Bear parades at the head of a file of women. Twice the thunder claps its great hands again over the roof of the rock shed and then breaks into madness of erratically-timed applause. The black crag of cloud over the west wall moves nearer and a great sucking wind passes high over the yard, shredding the lighter clouds this side of the crag.

“He’s bringin’ ’em out on the yard. Just like ’im. He ain’t got even as much sense as a rooster or he’d get ’em in out o’ the wet.”

The Bear and his charges are a quarter of the distance between the street-end and the rock

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shed. The shed is but a roof on posts, open to all weather, and is the nearest cover now for the visitors. Under the light closely reflected from the clouds above the yard the women’s July garments are brilliant as flowers of the south. The thunder gambols ponderously and the air is drunken with rain. Color rears apart from color in the women’s dresses as they float with the movements of the wearers. All the color we have, barring the brief blossoms of three peach trees, is in the red walls, the white stones and the black

bars of the cells. Any other color we see is brought in by those who come to visit the pens.

The wind lowers its voice as it rams the crag of cloud and breaks it down. "I hope this blows over so that damned fool won't bring those women in here," a vic remarks. He peaks his glance hopefully at the scuttering clouds. "I haven't been near a woman for twelve years, and if...

"Wait a minute, cannon; wait a minute," laughs the man at his left hand. "If it's been that long them dames won't need to be afraid of you. You've lost it all by now."

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"Don't be so sure," the other answers, convincingly serious.

Pink lightning makes orgy among the segments of cloud crag as they shunt down the wind. The Bear is leading the clutter of color to the rock shed. "I didn't think even that bird could be so dumb," says The Red Miller. "But I suppose you have to be before they make you the bull-screw in a dump like this. That guy oughta have better sense than to bring them women around a bunch of vics close like that."

Minute puffs of dust leap off the cinders at the end of the brick street. The women mass a squeal and run toward the shed. The dustpuffs move ahead in a ragged line, making such a pattern as a machine gun barrage makes. "Throw down them hammers and come back in this end of the shed," Rock Gang Slim orders from the east end of a trough. "Them women'll have to get under here."

The Bear charges lumberingly ahead of the women. His middle jolts heavily up and down, and when he arrives his face is more red than usual. "All right, gentlemen," he puffs, "move

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down the shed and make room for the visitors."

Color and stricken light voices flurry into the west end of the shed. "My dress is ruined!" complains a short, brunette girl. "And my hat, too, I suppose." She takes off her hat and fillips drops from it. She regrets dampening even her fingertips.

"Well, go on — take off the dress," growls a vic in the staring, sniffing mob.

"Lis'en, that'll be all of that," the second guard threatens. "Another crack like that and you'll see the deputy."

"What the hell did he bring 'em in here for, then?" the vic growls reply. His eyes fleer at the women and his nostrils outswell like a stallion's.

"Where's the guy didn't have a woman for twelve years?" asks a vic in low tone, stretching his neck to find his man. "What's he crabbin' about? There's guys in here haven't had one for twelve and won't have one for twenty. How'd 'e like that?"

"Lay off!" another vic commands him sharply. "That plug's doin' it all. He's got it bad enough without you rubbin' it in, you damned fool!"

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"Aw, how'd I know it?"

"Keep your trap shut and lay off."

Wind whirls a sheet of rain edge-on into the women's end of the shed and carries to us the crazing female exhalation. The women mew and step closer down the shed. New stirring seizes us and we mill, trampling one another's feet. Our nerves are seething and heat is behind our eyes building pain. Thunder goes over the roof like laden wagons in a covered bridge. Lightning bristles in long antennæ from the sweep of jet cloud, and thick swinging ropes of rain punish the cinders.

"Hey, screw, can't we go further back?" pleads a vic to Rock Gang.

"My name ain't screw, convict. No, you'll get wet back there."

"Let me go, then, by myself. That'll be better than this." He bobs his ugly head at the women.

"Stay where you are, I said," Rock Gang snaps. "Who's runnin' this, you or me?"

By fractions of inches the women come closer. Perfumes drift urgently over us in the sodden air. The Bear stays on the other side of the

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women, away from us. Those nearest him are plaining that he should have taken them to more substantial shelter. He makes a wilted effort to explain, swinging his bloated hands. The women nearest us look fright into our faces. Our craving reaches them and they wish themselves away. "Rubber, you bitch!" a thin young vic exclaims. "I wish I had you where I could make you rubber right."

"Which one?" the man beside him asks.

“Oh, any one — even that old one. I’m here long enough for that, now.”

Rock Gang pushes through us and walks around the women to speak to The Bear. He bumps a woman off a flat rock she has been standing on and she steps into a stream sluicing through the shed. “You awkward thing!” she slashes at him. He sputters and hurries away.

“I could do better than that,” a vic jibes. Two of the women titter. “See, they like me!” the vic announces, for all of us.

“They ought to know your record and they’d go crazy about you,” he is told. “Only not the way you mean.”

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“I never had to go without one,” he returns, pride lifting his voice.

“Are you braggin’? Nobody ever had to go without one.”

“There’s some that do.”

The Bear walks carefully toward the west end of the shed and looks out. “Pull in your fat head!” someone calls to him. He turns and his look scorches us. “Who said that?” the second guard would be informed.

“Ask a stool pigeon,” is his answer.

To the woman who appears oldest The Bear speaks with the bowed head of a confidant. She addresses three others and the four go to the end of the shed with The Bear.

“Look at that little fat one! Damn! Where was she hidin’?” All the restrained juices of the vic’s nature

saturate his tone. "Boy! How'd that be!"

"Any of 'em," one adds.

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Thinner now are the ropes of rain. The thunder has passed down the sky and is stumbling loudly over farther hills of cloud. The Bear circulates on the edges of his covey and

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slowly works it toward the end of the shed. The women pull at their dresses, peep into mirrors and mop their noses with puffs. The perfume dims as the air lightens, and the odor of females loses rigor in our nostrils. At last the rain diminishes until we can hear the blobs from the edges of the roof spatter gravidly against the cinders.

"Well, go on and get them out of here," Rock Gang speaks in his throat, looking at The Bear. He passes in and out among us to learn our temper. The crowd shifts. One man stands with his back against a trough and his chin against his breastbone. "What's the matter with you?" Rock Gang asks.

"Nothin'."

"What the hell are you mopin' about?"

"None of your God damned business! Get the hell away from me!"

"Don't talk to me like that, or..."

The vic walks rapidly away. Rock Gang stares, but says no more.

"There they go, convicts!" Drifty Ballou shouts. The Bear and the women are on the yard steering for the shops.

“Yeh, even the old one,” the thin young man insists aloud to himself.

“All right, cut out the jabber and make them hammers leap,” Rock Gang orders. The women turn out of view around the boilerhouse.

IV THE BRAINS

ON the road and in the cities we have met, in the long times after many lesser meetings, men with intellects beyond their tricky work. The roughs and the toughs of the road, the flash city dives and the jails come largely from the spots in cities in which life is so cluttered that none can shield all its ambulant particles. Some come — they are few — from the smaller communities, through migrations for work. These are the men who on a night of hunger take thievery to help them, and find the help good, and keep it. The intellects come, and sometimes after long years in the strait way of righteousness, from everywhere. On the road and in the cities we have met them, and among our thousands behind the high red walls is a selection from among them. It would be so. The great hands that assort us and set us apart

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leave in a seedling few from the intellects, for a reason known only to the will directing the hands.

From among the herded many here in their gray uniforms the eye cannot mark off the few with the greater convolutions. Many books are there for teaching how to know a man by the width and the depth of his brow, by what he says and passes unsaid, and by the symbolism of his objectified desires. We look more closely into the books, and the largest knowledge we win is that in their learned eagerness the

creators of the books forgot to include the means for knowing how to use the gleanings among men who breathe and moan. We search again, and honestly, among the shifting, miseried host, and see only that the few are lost in the larger pattern of the many.

• • • • •

Two men speak each other as we circle and circle again around the cell-block inside the cellhouse walls on a workless day of rain. “It’s funny about The Brains. They don’t none of ’em seem to be crooked,” one says. And the other, “I didn’t use to think so, but now I do.

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I use to think they was so cagey they went crooked on the rest of us and nobody was smart enough to find out about it. Now I don’t think so. I guess they’re all right and they think about things besides how to do somebody dirty.” They go with hands mated behind their bent loins in the walkaround that is our only exercise when the weather fails us.

“Here’s somethin’, though: If one of those kind comes in and gets into these duds you can’t tell him from any of us. But he’ll find the other ones like him before he’s been in here a week,” one says. And the other, “Yeh.”

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Something about The Brains is laid aside when the books are created, then. The eye looks at the trapped men and sees them each like each. The creators cannot put into their books what their eyes will not tell them. With another sense than sight they delve men and find

them each unlike, but they cannot reshape for their books the findings of the delving sense. That leaves us out, for our ablest sense is sight, and it is the sight that reads the books. The Brains, though — each possesses his own sense for delving men,

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and after the lock rattles in the high, wide gates each of The Brains quickly finds his way among those he will have and those he will put aside and forget.

“Well, we are all on the same yard behind the same red walls, and when The Brains rattle we can listen. We are better guarded against assault here than ever we were outside. No one in a gray uniform can order us to move on and enforce the order. It wants some one in a blue uniform for that. When The Brains rattle we sit about and listen. Sometimes The Brains gather us into the bright web of words, even, and try to do something for us. If only they would name us a right reason for altering, though. They are here and we are here, and we cannot determine who has won.

It is a quality of The Brains, though, that they have us know they would rather we were as they are than that we remain as we are, and are willing to help any of us work the conversion. Every man fears The Brains when he meets them first. He fears that power to delve the contents of a skull. But his conviction of danger changes, later, after he has heard The Brains rattle, and

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the more quickly if on a day he is included in the words.

• • • • •

We slap a handball against the wall until the sun forces us away. Then we go and sit among the rocks with The Brains. To-day they are but six. One is the tall, mellow lifer who talked with us on the Sunday after we came in, the man whose eyes are a perpetual forgiveness for everyone, everything. One is a slender, blond Jew of less than thirty. Cynicism and sparkle are his. Two men, both of them short and dark-skinned, look like brothers, save that one's eyes are brown and the other's lemon-green. The fifth man wears a brush of black and gray hair above a bumpy forehead. Spectacles bridge his long, heavy nose. Last among them is the over-tall, pallid man whose face is incisive with many suppressions. He adds fewest words when The Brains meet together. Watching him, we understand that he meticulously computes the worth of all words and swiftly throws away those of no value, never receiving a stain from them.

"Will," — the spectacled man addresses himself to the lifer — "I have read some more of

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Stephen Crane since we last discussed imagination. I've revised my view of the imagination slightly. But I still am not with you on everything."

Good humor brightens inside the lifer and glows through his eyes. "You are going the right way about, though, Johnson. If it is not too trite, the finest teachers of the varieties and the uses of the imagination are those who work with the imagination creatively."

Speaks the Jew, with a cast of accent, "Marx did the same for economics, Will, that Crane did for war, and

his imaginative ability sets out for you one of the varieties. Do you see that, Johnson?"

"Not quite. I'm trying. I have hope for myself."

"Relate your discussion to the immediate if you wish to do more than make sounds," the pallid man says. His is the desiccated intonation of the pedagogue.

"Yes... yes," one of the two short men urges. "We have everything here that you can find outside. Excepting the ladies." His full being, past question, is hurt by this lack.

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Will, the lifer, says, "We were talking last week about first, absence of imagination, and second, varieties of imagination at work. Within the numerical limits our three holy men will illustrate. Your rabbi, Lebson," — he bends toward the Jew — "is a man of considerable imaginative ability. And the quality is good. His imagination is schooled by some thought. I've heard him, and I've yet to hear him tell his men to be good, to do good, to prepare for a better life either after they go out or after they die. He knows the largest problem of each convict is his problem of keeping alive and as sane as may be in here, and instead of bringing the men dolors he brings them imaginative understanding. He wants to make them know he is so human that they will be pleased to see him again next service day and will hold him to be a," — he asks the word of the wall, — "let us say a non-condemning contact with the outside. And he knows his one chance to do so is dependent on his ability to make himself, for them, as nearly like them as is in him."

“You honor my people,” Lebson laughs, lightly ironic. “You’ll have Johnson quarreling

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with both of us. Johnson still thinks the informed Jew is the bright man’s burden.”

“Nonsense!” Johnson denies. “Besides, you’re punning.”

Will continues. “Regardless, your rabbi is a drilled worker with the imagination. He lives in himself the imaginative approximation of each of his men’s nearest suffering and then, as an artist, he creates for each the one, the only right, emollient.”

“You do honor my people,” Lebson contends.

“So?” asks the pallid man.

“So we come to the prison chaplain.”

“My God!” exclaims the man with lemongreen eyes.

“His God,” Will corrects. “The chaplain is a chaplain for the same reason that one man is a machinist and another is a forger — it happened so. The differences all compliment the machinist and the forger, for the machinist undoubtedly has at least love to move him, and the forger, granting its near bounds and the aberrant angle of its operation, has imagination. Both have skill. The chaplain is too placid to know love, which teaches, and imagination is not in

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him. The absence of imagination is sufficiently proved by the contents of the library. Do you see, all of you, that the library is in two parts?” He sweeps them with

a glance, giving them time for answering. None of them speaks.

“Part one exists by will of the chaplain. It is his. He is even proud of it. It contains only tracts, even if some of them are heavy, are bound in boards and are not called tracts. They are the ‘Do good’ books. Part two exists because the chaplain has not the power to learn what the books contain — has not the capacity to follow an implication to its full development. He is of about the same value to the convict as a spiritual guide as a hairpin would be to the convict for picking the lock on the front gates.”

“That leaves only the minister from downtown,” Johnson puts in. “Is he worth entering in evidence? He told a lifer— Pardon, Will, if that is too immediate.” Will smiles and waves all aside with a calm gesture. “A lifer asked the minister, ‘What can be done in my case?’ The minister told him to pray in the morning as well as at night. I wish he had been joking, even on that subject. But he was serious.”

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“Precisely,” says Will. “He has some imagination, but it is not of this earth, and is worthless. So much imagination is — worthless because not tutored by thought. The minister’s imagination always has ready a pair of wings and a halo. The minister tells the men to be good, but never how nor why. His precept is, ‘Be good and you will pass on to something better’; never, ‘If you would pass on to something better, be good,’ nor ‘To do thus is to be good.’ ”

“Pitiful!” sneers the Jew. “Is any of them, including the mentor of the souls of mine own people, worth so many words?”

“Likely not,” offers the pallid man.

The Jew turns toward the short, brown-eyed man. “I shall have been here six years in the fall. I have studied all these years, and have used this great romancer, the imagination, that causes this discussion. Will I do differently afterward than I did before? The deputy warden asked me that a few days ago. I couldn’t tell him.”

“That is to-morrow’s worry,” the short man answers.

“Which is why I worry about it to-day.”

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In the little silence that drops over them the men look at one another. The Brains are delving. The pallid man cons the Jew as if trying to learn why he has placed a material issue in the discussion of the nebulous. Will releases the tension, speaking:

“Your deputy is another study. He has imagination. I’ve heard it insisted he has none. But he has.”

“Yes, he has,” Lebson appends. “I am in his office, and I have watched his imagination work.”

“I believe, then,” Will goes on, “you will not disagree with me when I say your deputy is just this side of being a complete sadist. He is that, and also he is a man with remarkable control. He creates many plans for hurting his subjects, yet he stays well inside the regulations most of the time in issuing sentences. His imagination works not to, but away from the

convict. His only mental relation with the men is a perverted relation. His imagination is encased in ice. Sometimes the warmth of his perversion melts the ice and he hurts someone deliberately, builds

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a plan and follows it out. But that is not often. For the rest, convicts do break rules.”

“Fortunately,” adds the pallid man. His mouth clicks to like a trap after the word escapes. “Spirit, even that kind, should not die.”

The man with green eyes bends all his muscles to the completion of a yawn. “Enough of it,” he says. “Imagination is well enough, and we’ll allow the variations. We’ll allow everything. We have to, in truth. But let us talk of something else — say sweetness and light.”

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We rise and leave The Brains to their new subject. They are here and we are here. We are all deep in the well inside the high red walls, and we cannot determine who has won.

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V OLE LONG AN' TALL

THIRTY-SIX Negroes are under the showers. Four men are brown and a tall, hot-eyed man whose face is keen with bitterness well leashed is yellow. The others are black. Around the walls on low, wooden benches a scattering of Negroes and a crowd of white men wait for the water. The rock gang follows the Negroes at the weekly bath. After the first of the Negroes bathe the group remaining and the whites take their bath together. We are lathered with August and low vitality, and the Africans under the showers will delay as long as the bathhouse guard will permit. The guard on the door has nothing to say in the matter, either for the bathhouse guard or for us.

Among the Negroes is not a poor body, barring the legs and the feet. At each pair of shoulders, be the man large or small, is vitality

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molded in knowing muscle and obedient tendon. A good body knows itself, feels itself lift and shift under the flexion and tension of work or play, and pride is in each of the Negroes' ability of bone and flesh.

Laughter runnels through the lisp and gurgle of the water, rising and falling like wind in a forest on a fair day. Song comes out of the water curtains, bold and braggart but tainted always with the mourning that is in even the gayest of Negro music. Only the tall yellow man neither laughs nor sings. He bears his head erect

and half aloof, like a challenge, his eyes all pain and contempt. Between his big teeth he holds his lower lip, gnawing it fast or slowly as his mood swings, and looks over the heads of his darker, unreckoning brothers.

“Look at Ole Long an’ Tall,” a big black cackles to the others. “Hold up his haid lahk a spreadin’ addah. Think he somebody!... What scheme you fixin’ up now, long boy?”

*He long an’ tall...
Think, he got it all,*

a small, older man jeers melodically.

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*May be long,
But he don’ count so tall...*

“That puttin’ him in de dozen, Singin’ Man! Sing him out some mo’. Sing him some mo’ dem pop-outs. He jus’ a lowdown lahk you an’ me but he think he somebody!”

The long man hears, but looks steadily over the others’ heads. When he looks down at his body he does it quickly, denying the others even a fast glance into his eyes. They turn from him and ridicule one another and sing.

Down at the end of one of the two strings of showers is a jet youth of good height whose body later will collect fat. He calls to a man four showers away on the other string: “Heah De Dude squeal w’en he get

a rock on his foot dis evenin'? Ha... ha-a-a... Soun' lahk a shoat wid de bluejays afteh him. Boy sho was scairt!"

"All right, brave boy, all right, you git your'n some day, 'nen we see how you handle 'at fat mouf," the ridiculed answers.

Sympathy and more detraction come to him.

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"Tain't no hahm squealin' w'en you hu't," one tells him.

"Who was hurt?" another asks in a voice so big it almost blows the water aside. "Who was hurt? Little chip o' rock never hurt no man big as that man. He was just 'fraid he was daid, tha's all."

"Naw he wasn'," another puts in. "Dat man was hu't. Wasn' no chip o' rock fell on 'im. Ah seen 'at rock. How about it, Ole Long an' Tall — you was theah?"

The tall Negro looks storm at his questioner, holding his hands and his trunk motionless until the other man turns his eyes away.

For a space the thirty-five are as silent as the yellow man. The water out of the large-bore shower heads slaps the concrete floor with enticement of coolness after our day of flailing rock. "Come on, colored people," a white man complains, "get it over and let us wash down."

"Go dirty," a black answers. "We stays heah 'til cap'n say we git out. So go on an' go dirty."

The white man lapses on his bench. His face is weak and anxious and he holds no threat for the

bathers. The Negro's cheeks puff in a grin.

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Then he sings, of purpose refusing to dignify the white man with a pop-out:

*Ole houn' jump 'im a squirrel;
Chase 'im up a tree:
Houn' dawg couldn' ketch de squirrel...
No woman cain't ketch me.*

"An' dat's de truf!" one shouts. "You wheah no woman goin' do you any good, boy. You a long time in de bighouse."

"Ain' it so!" a second cries. "Woman jus' as much good to you now as a paih o' shoes to a cawpse."

"Ain' no lyin' about dat," the other laughs. "Know whut dat woman say when he leave? She say, 'Bye-bye, Bad Boy: room in de saddle fo' a good man now.' Ain't it whut she say, boy? 'At's whut mine say, an' dey all de same."

"Did'n' no woman say no kind o' good-by to Ole Long an' Tall," a third man affirms. "Man so mean no woman evah call him Big Boy. He make a woman git de shakin' chills!"

*Got de shakin' chills:
Tell you gal good-by...*

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*Got de shakiri chills, mah daddy,
Ari Ah'm sho to die.*

“Won’ no woman evah cry huh eyes out ovah a man lahk dat man.”

The yellow man lifts up his head as if he will retort. He moves his contemptuous scrutiny up one line of bathers and down the other, then his own body again takes his attention. His flesh is shaped without excess in any part. Down his long belly and around and down his thighs his big hands move a caress. He may not have had many women, but of a surety some one woman has had joy and disquiet in him. His kind is the one-woman kind, but that one woman never can be sure.

“Look at ’im paw ’is meat,” one of the taunters calls. “Got so much an’ it all goin’ to waste.”

“Go to waste anywhere. Don’ nobody want it. Man so mean he nevah do no woman no good.”

*Man so mean,
Make a woman cry.*

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*Man so mean,
Nev ah goin’ a die.*

• • • • •

Down through the long room comes the bathhouse guard, rapping the walls above the sitters’ heads with his club. “Back out!” he shouts. “Back out! You won’t

be any whiter if you stay in all night. Come on, back out and let these other men have 'em."

"Heah de cap'n," a black man drawls loudly. "No mo' watch fo' de cullud boys. Rivah done gone dry."

"Back out of it!" the guard shouts again.

Reluctance slows the movements of the blacks. They look too patiently for soap and wash clouts and some even feign sudden deafness. The cells will be as ovens, and every man will be confined for the next fourteen hours.

One of the first away from the water is the long yellow man. He scorns the others with his back and comes to sit between two of us whites in a vacant space on one of the benches. Anger gives each of his motions jerkiness. In staccato he pulls on his rough socks. He is talking to himself:

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"Damned black fools! Inside or outside walls they are fools. No wonder everybody shoves them and spits on them. Why shouldn't they? Fools! They deserve it. They deserve worse. They don't deserve to live. Women and scorchbelly whisky is all that's in their thick heads. And church. They go to church in here and get heated up the same as they go outside. And it means as little."

He jams his head in the folds of his undershirt and curses his fumbling effort to free it. The guard is down among the thick of the Negroes, hurrying them. He walks from knot to knot, profanely urging. While the men were under the showers he went from the bathroom on a mission not concerned with bathing and

has fallen behind his time schedule. He would receive a reprimand were The Bear to come in now. "Get 'em on and get out," he insists. He turns and sees the yellow man. "What the hell are you so slow about?" he shouts, coming up to the one who has islanded himself among the whites. "Get them clothes on and get out of here."

Fury halts the tall yellow man's dressing. He

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looks evilly at the guard. "I said get 'em on and get out," the guard repeats.

"I heard you," the Negro answers. "Yes, I heard you. And now I'll tell you something. See that gang down there? You think I'm the same as they are. Well, you're wrong. I know I'm in prison and I know I'm not white. But I...

"Now that'll be all out of you," the guard spurts. Anger has emptied his face of color, and his club hand twitches. "I said hurry, didn't I? All right, get in a hell of a hurry and get out of here. One more word out of you and I'll put you on report." He looks at us whites. "What are you stallin' about? Find a shower, and make it fast."

We get off the bench. The Negro, half dressed, also gets off. "Now what?" the guard asks.

We move away a few feet and turn to watch. The Negro shoves his right arm above his head and through the sleeve of his undershirt and continues the motion swiftly downward as a blow to the guard's chin. It places lightly. The guard draws off a step and poises his club. "I

won't hit you again," the Negro says, as explanation, not as appeal.

"That means permanent isolation for you," the guard says in a raging voice. "And I'll be damned sure to see you get as little to eat as they'll give you. And your good-time's gone, don't forget that."

Nodding his head courtly the Negro says, "Thank you. It will be better than spending any more time with that gang down there."

We step into the chill of the showers as the guard leads Ole Long an' Tall to the door. One of his brothers jeers:

*He long an' tall—
Now he goina do it all...*

VI TIME

ANOTHER day comes over the piled red bricks to paint the rear walls of the cells with rigid black shadows, one shadow for each rigid bar in the fronts of the cells. All shadows here are stiff and straight or stiff and angular, as are the bars, the buildings and the rules, saving only the shadows of the vics as they go about their tasks or take their Sunday promenade. The shadows of the vics are blobbed by the shapelessness of their clothes into figures as formless as is each life inside each uniform.

We wake as the light comes over the walls and roll in our bunks and scratch, wishing for curtains to draw against the day, that we might not remember the sun is yellow and our right is only the right to curse it. We are not privileged to spend all our daylight hours in work, as some of us spent them occasionally in another

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time and as millions will spend them to-day. Mostly we were not workers before we came through the great metal gates, but to-day we would give the long half of life to work just for the chance to move out of sight of one another and away from the high red walls.

Some hours from the moment when night edged into day the bugle will screech and another official round for the prison will begin. We shall do our work unthinking, giving to it no love for its own sake nor giving through it love to anyone we know. No one, not

even the men who come after us into this city of meaningless men doing meaningless tasks, can conceivably take any good from our efforts. They who follow us here — might they die sooner — may do a kind of work other than the kind of work we do, yet their days will be as loveless and their compelled diligence will come to as little. We are doing time, and they who come after us will come for the same end.

• • • • •

Still the night guard patters on muted soles up and down the long galleries in front of the cells. For the next two hours he will harvest

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curses from men who have been cursed so deeply that now only curses will grow out of them. Among us is the too-small few so made that not all the abuses flung at them will bend them from the way of right in which natally they were set down. These few are here by the will of accident. They should not be here. Somehow they have learned what most of us will never know, that honor and good spirit reward themselves increasingly. They can never purify these others of us, we who came crippled into our first hour of light and have never been mended.

“Walk your beat, you filthy rat!” the man celling alone to the south spits after the heels of the guard. “You’d tote gun on your own mother!” If the guard hears, he dissembles. He came to his work in mid-youth and now his hair is gray, and in the years between he has heard many worse morning thoughts than the little black Italian man has offered him. Each

evening he counts us in from the day guard. He walks the ground tier and the five galleries and counts—“One, two, three, four, five, six...” — face, face, face, face, face, face... Faces, bars and numbers and the night and morning

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count, these are his life. He carries about the galleries with him one hope, that he may die quietly in his bed instead of in terror spasms and blood under the claws of some released vic.

The little black Italian man scrapes his hide with his nails, working a meditative quality into the sound. Then comes from his cell the small voice of paper as he rolls his morning cigarette, which he has learned is no fortifier against the breakfast that will be sloshed down in front of him, but which he will roll every morning regardless, out of inertia of living.

On the rear walls of the cells the shadows lose stature as the sun lifts higher above the east wall of our home and smears the shadows of the gunguards across the trampled cinders of the yard. Gun-guards on the walls lift their rifles from tired shoulders to tired shoulders and yawn into the stare of the sun. The night shift will soon pass us on to the day shift and we shall do it all over again. We scratch and yawp and become more vocal as the light grows through the cellhouse windows. One man finds heart for song that muffles the noisy spinning of water in toilets

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and washbowls as we prepare for our morning food:

*Oh-ho say can you see
Where the bedbugs bit me
While I laid in my bunk...*

The guard starts for the singer's cell at a run. "Run your beat, you rat!" the little Italian shouts. "You'd stop your own kids from singin'." As the guard's feet hit the stair from C gallery to D gallery a vic bawls the warning, "Here comes the screw!" and silence kills the song. Every man in the cell-block is mute for a moment, then a massed "Boo-o-o-o" goes up, as greeting for the guard and as thank offering for breakfast.

Our day has begun, and we shall do our stint all over again. Likely the chaplain is sponging sleep from his untroubled eyes at the moment his Christian charges welcome the day with booing.

• • • • •

We are doing time. Grave men who have found time to become learned in the laws have

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given each of us time in which to become penitent for our deeds of the past, perhaps expecting that we would count the days over as if they were the strung beads of a rosary. With some of us the grave men exceeded generosity and allotted to us all the time between sentence day and the day on which death calls for us in his black cart. Those of us for whom the grave men have provided food, clothing and a roof for life may become penitent, down the years near the end of our

days. Most of the others of us will not. We are doing time, not life, and we shall use our time planning a larger way of living for smaller expenditure than we had before we came here. We shall try so to order our time and our affairs after we leave here that we shall take much and give little, and thereby bear each his burden in a world that reckons the value of being by the value of what is held. We shall attempt wisdom — shall attempt easily to collect possessions in quantity meet to balance any regret we may feel for having done time at the behest of the grave men. Each man believes those possessions his due, and his due is each man's desire.

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Time goes past on little feet, pacing with short steps and moving as silently and as slowly as the sun moves, precisely from dawn to dark and dark to dawn. No man's grief or shame or hate will make it break its slow pace. A wife, a child or a convict's free partner may fret, weep, curse, trying to shove time ahead to the day of the convict's release, and time still will move in short steps ahead on little feet. The mind of each man, if the sentence be less than life, spurts ahead to the day of release the instant the man enters here through the great metal gates. In the after days behind the high red walls the man may seem to have taken indifference for companion. He may turn to his keepers the dim face of resignation and neither weep nor curse aloud. But in his soul he screams that the days are overlong and the long black nights are longer.

• • • • •

“Now we’ll crack ’em,” a big vic remarks as we leave the mess hall after breakfast to form our lines on the brick streets. He is halfway through a twenty-year hitch. Every workday morning for the last ten years he has said aloud

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or to himself, “Now we’ll crack ’em.” He has broken a hill of rock in the last ten years, and most of it is still heaped with the production of other men between the rock shed and the brickyard, -unused. He will break another hill of rock in the next ten years if he stays out of isolation, and it like the first will lie mostly unused, even after the big vic has passed outward by the way through which he entered. The broken rock will lie unused for many years and other men will come here after the big vic and break more rock and build the rockpiles higher. The big vic’s sentence of hard labor will be done, and keepers and vics will look at the hills of broken rock and wonder why.

So is all our labor in the long days behind the high red walls. Men crack their backs over machines making shoes and clothing for vics who will make shoes and clothing for other vics, and thus on while prisons stand and women bear children to fill them. Mothers will sniffle and sweat in childbed and fathers will work in all weathers for sons and daughters who at a snap of life’s fingers will go to prison to receive the burden of time and labor from earlier convicts, and bear

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it until others are marked by life and set out by the grave men of the laws to take it over.

• • • • •

Upward from the cinders moves the band of sunlight on the inside of the east wall as the unfailing tick of the planets marks off the universal seconds and the sun lumbers down out of sight. Stones forming the top course of the wall take the sunlight imperceptibly from the red bricks and then give it off into the empty air. Slowly out from deep angles of the buildings night grows from seeds of shadow and fills the vacant yard. The arc lamps leap awake on the yard and stare all night, guarding the cinders against the tread of any convict until dawn comes again up the outside of the east wall and looks in at our barred windows. Electricians in the cell-houses light the windows brightly until nine, and less brightly after the bugle sounds taps. The rules say silence must be observed in all cell-blocks after taps. The bugle blows, the lights in the cells are snapped off, silence comes to cell with us, and time seems to walk more slowly around the galleries, now that the void work of the day is done.

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We undo the bungled catches of our outer garments, drop the garments off, and crawl into our blankets in the narrow bunks. Most of us cell two and two, one man in a lower bunk in which he cannot sit erect and one man in an upper bunk which he must climb to reach. After a few months of time have gone past on the little, evenly-pacing feet each convict becomes

aware that he needs increasingly fewer hours for sleep. He has more hours than in which to lie wakeful and silent between the time the sunlight goes up the inside of the east wall and disappears and the time it comes again up the outside and builds rigid black shadows in his cell. In these wakeful, silent hours beyond all others he screams in his soul that time is slow, and holds him back from fulfillment of the plans he has made for the larger and easier life to be his after the last tick of his time inside becomes articulate in the click of the lock in the great metal gates, closing after him as he goes out.

For some hours after we come to our cells for the night we hear in our heads the beating of

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the varied prison machinery and the rock hammers. The beating holds tempo with the pacing of the night guard on the galleries and the pacing of time invisible to the arc lamps past the cell-house windows on the cindered yard. Afterward we hear only the beating of our hearts as we lie listless in the narrow bunks.

• • • • •

Time will win in the end and will go on with the sun, pacing around the world, lighting walls ahead and dimming them behind. Our hearts cannot keep pace always. The beating of our hearts one night will stumble, slow, and die. And that will be better.

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VII ESCAPE

STEAM plunges upward in a long jet that goes unwavering into the sunny air. We look at one another and then at the guards. From the wall towers the gun-screws run with rifles at ready. We look back again at the boilerhouse stack and watch the whistle handle jiggle. Through the steam jet howls the great informing voice of the whistle— “Yee-e-ow-ee-ow-ee-e-ow-e-oweeee...”

“Drop them hammers and line up, men,” Rock Gang bellows, trying to outvoice the whistle.

Convicts boil out of the stone shop and the tailor shop. We see across the yard the annex guard herding the lungers indoors out of the sun.

“Yee-e-ow-ee-ow-e-oweeee...” the whistle cries.

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Down behind us at the brick plant a driver curses his mules. He beats them away from the wagon and we hear their excited hoofs carrying them to the stables.

“She’s wildcat as hell,” a vic in the rock gang shouts, nodding toward the whistle. Hurry catches the prison. A small mob of guards whirls around a corner of the boilerhouse and comes up the yard, kicking dust. The guards wear pistols in their belts and carry rifles.

“Keep that line damn still,” Rock Gang orders. “I’m going to count you and I’m going to count you right. The man that moves will be in isolation in the morning.” His voice is thin and brittle.

“Hurrah!” a vic applauds.

“Count, then,” says another. “You ain’t lost nobody.”

Echoes repeat the voice of the whistle from yard and cell-house walls. Hate and determination are in the sound.

Rock Gang completes the count. “Are you real sure we’re all here?” someone asks him. The Bear is on the cinders this side of the street-end.

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“Wait,” the guard tells us, watching his chief.

Three men run up the slope from the brick plant. After them comes a guard. His club bobbles on the end of its lanyard like a hanged man in a storm.

The wall guards chase one another up and down in a silhouetted comedy of attention. Above the gate to the recreation yard the machine gun swings its black nozzle in a semicircle of threat.

The Bear turns back onto the street. “Move it along, men,” Rock Gang orders us. “Trot it up.” We lope across the yard. Dust follows us, fouling the air at the end of the line. Men are still coming from the shops down below the boilerhouse. From the stack the lusting voice of the whistle shrieks louder as we near the street — “Yee-e-e-ow-eee-ow-eeee-ow-e-ow...” Up and down the agile register of warning runs the voice out of the metal throat. For miles about our home the citizenry is arming to turn back the man who has made the break. There are dollars in it.

Armed guards make knots at the gate between

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the main yard and the recreation yard and the gate between the recreation yard and outside. The workers from outside the walls will trot in soon.

“There’s the bull stool pigeon of the dump,” a vic in the file says as we run past the boilerhouse. He twists his neck and looks up. “Howl — and God damn you!”

At the doors of the cell-houses the harried lines of men clot and jam. Guards insist on order and speed. We lag, to worry them. A guard blurts into one of the jams and clutches a vic. “Stop holdin’ up that line.” The vic tears his coat from the guard’s hands and pushes ahead through the door. “I’ll have you on report for that,” the guard promises.

“Hurry up and get into your cells,” the day screw of B cell-house repeats as we pass through the door. “Every man stand up to the bars in five minutes for count.”

Up the clanging stairs we go, and down the long galleries to our kennels. The lock chains rattle at the doors and the doors crash to. “Stand up for count now,” the screw bellows.

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“Aw, go count your marbles,” a vic bellows reply.

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The cell-house walls between us and the whistle mute the howling voice. The sound that comes through the walls is low, but it fills the dead, heated air of the house and reechoes in our ears. Scattered shuffling on the yard beneath the windows tells where guards and convicts yet run. “Yee-e-e-ow-e-e-ow-e-ow-eee...” the voice cries.

Men are shouting on all the galleries. Our nerves pitch and buckle as do the nerves of animals before storm falls. None of us knows who has escaped, but we urge him on in our minds.

Out beyond the walls is a man with urgency bulging his eyes. He whimpers with effort. We see him in the brown river, swimming downstream and feeling with his whole body for swifter water. Over him and spreading ahead is the whistle call. Looking back over his shoulder he sees the jet of steam above the walls. We see him again in a leaping rush through corn and hear the slithering voice of the dusty leaves he tears as he runs. Gritty heat is in his throat.

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Behind him in the corn the wind gallops with the sound of running feet, the feet of men who will maul and beat him first and question him after. He is worse than a convict. He is a convict escaped.

We stand at the bars and stare.

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The whistle opens its iron throat to its widest and screams a long footnote to the message it has sent, and then goes dumb.

“Who do you think he was?” a vic beneath us on the ground tier asks his cellmate.

“Who do I think he was? I don’t. All I say is this: Some vic made a lam. I hope he makes it stick.”

“That’s what I say, too.”

“Yeh... And even if he was a stool pigeon.”

“Yeh.”

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VIII MAD

HE came to our rock gang a year ago. A runty man he is, pigeon-breasted and short in the arms, and has a small head shaped like a coconut with flat ends. His small light-brown eyes change from dim by minute gradations to bright, as water in a meadow pool changes under the passage of clouds.

“Let me show you how to break that rock,” he insists to the men on each side of him, first one and then the other. They accept his whimsies easily, smiling at him. He moves into the swing of their hammers and compels them to stop lest they strike him. “Come on, let me show you how. I built monuments once. I know all about working rock. I used to get mad at the boss, and then I’d break a monument.”

He takes the hammer from the fat vic on his left. Fastidiously he fingers a lump of rock and

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balances the hammer, preparing to demonstrate. Then quickly he puts down the hammer and with the fingertips of his right hand begins methodically to scratch the back of his clipped head, starting on the left side and working over to the right. He has roughened his scalp to bleeding with much scratching. The fat man takes up the hammer and turns again to his task.

The second guard comes up, places his hands on his hips with his club dangling from hooked fingers, and

watches the runt. He looks at him from one side, moves over, looks at him from the other. From the puckered end of an eye the fat man watches the guard. "Now you're all scratched up fine," the guard speaks. "Now go on to work or I'll report you. You can scratch fine down there in isolation. That's all you'll have to do. You ain't broke a gallon of rock this morning. Go on, get into it."

"Let me show you how to break rock," the runt says, with his eyes asking the guard's permission. "I used to build monuments. Do you want to know what kind of monuments? Well, for dead men, that's what kind; and sometimes for women — dead ones. I made 'em fine. But

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sometimes I got mad at the boss and then I'd break 'em. Let me show you how. Only these rocks are too little. You need bigger ones."

The guard is confused. He suspects the runt is trying to talk his way into ease from labor, yet at times he works well.

"Don't let him fool you, screw," someone shouts from the opposite trough. "He's a faker. I know him."

"Yeh, watch him, policeman. If you catch him at somethin' they'll make you the warden." The guard looks carefully about, to learn who jeers at him.

The runt precisely places his lump of rock and taps it with the hammer. "I'll show you how this rock can be trimmed better than anybody in here trims it," he asserts. For five minutes he works. The guard turns away and prods a shirker down at the end of the

trough. As he starts back up the line of men the runt throws down his tool again.

“Pick it up again,” the guard orders. “You better go on to work now and cut out that monkey business or you’ll be down in isolation quicker’n you know.”

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Again the runt scratches his head, carefully, following something about inside his skull as a gardener follows a mole tunneling a lawn. He ignores the guard and stares at the far wall.

“Go on to work,” the guard insists, twitching his body to weight his command.

“That guy’s screwy, policeman,” the man calls who jeered at the guard earlier in the affair. “He’s goin’ cuckoo.”

“No, he ain’t,” the guard answers, looking about. “He wants to get out of work. Well, he can’t fool me.”

“Sure he can’t, policeman. You know everything. You’re a fox, you are. I don’t know why they keep you on a little job like the one you got.”

“That’s all right,” returns the guard. “I’ll get along. I ain’t in stir, anyway.”

“The hell you ain’t.” The argument has come into the open now. “You’re worse in than we are. We’ll get out some day. But somebody’ll blow your dumb head off if you ever get far away from the front gate again. You’re worse off than the screwy guy there.”

The guard looks at the vic and considers.

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The problem is too great for him, though. He turns back to his monument builder.

“Are you going to work?” he asks.

“I need some bigger rocks,” the runt complains, still scratching. “You get me some bigger rocks and I’ll make you some monuments.”

“Sure, go ahead, screw. He’ll fix up your whole family. But make him fix you up first.”

Against the trough the guard pushes the runt. He does not want to report to the deputy warden his inability to keep men working. That might mean the end of his service and, as he has been warned, the end of his life. Even the runt’s monument to stand over his hereafter is no sufficient attraction.

He tries again, with bait: “You go on to work and to-morrow I’ll see you get some big stuff to hammer on. Go on now.”

Without answering, the runt picks up his hammer and pounds the brown lump he holds with his left hand. His short, tough fingers have craft. In another day he probably was a good workman.

“Now you’re goin’ fine, cocky,” the fat man tells him kindly. “You go ahead an’ do a little

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work an’ that screw’ll let you alone. That’s better’n goin’ to isolation. We don’t like to see nobody go to isolation.”

The hammers make a hollow, bubbling noise, beating rock in the long trough. Those who slacked their labor to hear the tiff between the guard and the runt gradually shade into the rhythm of the work. The Negro at the end of Number 2 trough who sings but never talks gives voice draggily:

*Down in de jail ya'd,
Beatin' on de ole rock pile:
All Ab cain see am
Big rocks fo' a solid mile...
Said a solid mile.*

“That’s the answer, dinge; sing it!” one encourages. “Give the little man another one and make him happy!” The Negro sings again:

*Down in de jail ya'd,
(Mamma got a hea't lahk dis:
Big as huh haid, but
Ha'der dan de she'iff's fis')...
Said de she'iff's fis'.*

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“That boy knows two things: One of ’era’s the sheriff!”

Under the urging of the song, lightness grows in us. Out over the yard the heat-ghosts pirouette. Lazily scream the saws in the plant where the building stone is cut. We hear the low stammering of the machines in tailor and shoe shops and can almost hear the fountain of steam twirling upward from the escape whistle on the boilerhouse stack. Behind us at the brick plant under the slope of the yard a skinner chides a mule: “Giddap, crow bait, ’fore I fan your tail wi’ this leather.”

Down in de jail ya'd,

the Negro begins again,

Beatin' on de ole rock. pile.

"I won't hammer no more rock 'til I get some big ones," the runt suddenly announces, breaking the song. He dashes his hammer into the trough and plants his feet in a stance indicative of his contempt for a boy's labor. The first and the second guards come to him this time, the chief silently asking of his lieutenant an explanation

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of the mutiny. "I made monuments and I always worked with good stone, not little stuff like this." He throws a gesture of scorn at the trough. "I won't work any more 'til I get some big stone. And my head itches." He scratches, digging in more deeply than before, as if at last he is to uncover something.

"What do you call this, a strike?" the top guard questions. "Do you think you can get away with it?"

"Aw, be smart," the fat man interrupts. "That man needs to be worked on. He's cracked."

"How do you know?" the second asks.

"Watch him a little while an' find out," answers the fat man, addressing the first.

The noon whistle bawls and we knock off for our meal. The runt stirs about and delays the count. He goes with us to the mess hall, but after our meal the

first guard of our gang leads him from the hall alone before we others leave. He is not with us when we begin the afternoon shift.

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Four days later it is Sunday. A small group

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of us meets a hospital runner on the yard. “What’s become of the little bird with the itchy skull?” we ask him.

“He’s up there,” the runner answers, slanting his eyes at the top story of the hospital. “He’s a scream, that guy.”

“How is he?”

“He’s gone. All he does is talk about monuments.”

“How does he talk about ’em? What does he say?”

“Oh, all kinds o’ nutty things. He always says he got sore at the boss an’ broke the monuments. He says the monuments was better than the boss’ head. He says the boss’ head cracked easier than stone when ’e hit it with a hammer one day. That’s what ’e’s in here for.”

“What’re they going to do with him?”

“Take ’im away some day when they get some more to go along. They will if ’e don’t butt ’is head loose against the walls. He’s startin’ that now.”

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IX

ALCOHOLIC PRELUDE

SHINING and swift the ball goes past us and drops among the small heaps of cull bricks this side of the kilns. “Those people will kill somebody that way - one of these days,” a vic complains. We see a man running for the ball. We wave him back and go down for it. After we throw it back and turn to leave, the far side of the largest pile of bricks takes motion and a thin sweep of deep orange dust blows up from it. “Hello,” a thick, blurred voice calls.

We go over and look. Fat Bumpy Whittington lies among the bricks. He is rolled into a heap and brick stains mottle his gray uniform. Sweat boils out from his hair and flows down his obese face and neck. His grin is huge and free.

“What are you doing here, sleeping?”

“Drunk.” The grin enlarges still more.

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“What?”

“Drunk.”

“Drunk!”

“Like a owl.”

“Come on, get up. You’re not drunk.”

“Sure, drunk.” His great head bobs emphasis. Like a baby he jams his fists into his eyes and twirls them.

We step nearer. Liquor gases flow up with the brick-dust. Bumpy flounders over onto his belly and lifts his expansive stern into the air in an effort to set

his feet under him. We look about to mark the stations of the guards. Sunday movement and shouting are over the yard. Again Bumpy tries to rise. The bricks tumble and he noses down into them weightily. A bottle clinks. We push Bumpy and reach under. The bottle still is a quarter full. Bumpy wallows over onto his back and blandly gives back the mellow gaze of the sun.

“Where did you get it?” We are concerned, for Bumpy will lose his good-time and will win permanent isolation if he is found out. We will get almost the same treatment for aiding him.

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Bumpy’s grin is a permanent facial quality. The liquor has strengthened it. He bats his round blue eyes at us and waggles his hands merrily.

“Where did you get it?”

“Drink it. I can get some more.”

“Where did you get it?”

“Hospital.”

“Hospital?”

“Sure, hospital. Swell hospital. Gives you everything. Salts an’ whisky. ’Snice place. Everybody nice to you.”

“How did you get out with it?”

“How do I get inside safes?” he asks, blithe sagacity rumpling his forehead. “Have a drink. ’T’s like nitro. Good.”

We sniffle into the neck of the bottle. Bumpy rolls on the bricks and bawls laughter at us. “Drink some,” he urges, batting his eyes again. “Bighouse scat. ’T’s

good. Got it in the hospital. Know old Madame? He's dumb. Didn' see me get out with the bottle. Drink some."

What shall we do with him? To wait standing here will be wrong, for some guard will see us and come down. To sit with him will be

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worse. If a guard wanders this way and finds us he will shape a plot from our presence. To leave Bumpy will be wrong, also. He may take anger with him and go hunting trouble.

"Can you walk, Bumpy?"

"Walk? Don't want-a walk. Want-a stay here. Gi' me the bottle." We take a short drink each and pass him the bottle. He laughs quiveringly and asks, "'Fraid of it? 'Fraid of me? Go on away, then. Take care myself." He upends the bottle into his fat maw and sluices down the hot whisky. "Eh-h-h-h!" he approves. His tongue clicks satisfaction. "Goin'-a sleep now." He tries to ease his bulk into the bricks.

"Better come on and get up," we advise.

"Go 'way." He slaps with his hands as at insects. "Goin'-a sleep."

"Come on, get up, Bumpy." We reach down and tug at him. "Come on. We'll be going in, soon, and we'll get you to your cell if you'll be quiet."

An idea slugs into his head and he sits up. "Aw-right, I want-a go in an' thank The Doc."

"You can't do that, you damned fool, they'll slam you in the hole."

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“Yeh, got-a thank The Doc.” He lifts the bottle and tilts it into his mouth again. “Gone,” he comments dismally. “But I got-a thank The Doc.” Cheer takes him again.

“You can’t do that, Bumpy.”

“Sure I can. Got-a.”

He stumbles to his feet. We look at him and then at one another. We are four, and maybe we can talk our way past the screws with him. “Think we can make it?” one asks.

“Soon as the bugle blows we’ll try.”

“Le’s go,” Bumpy laughs. “Got-a thank The Doc.”

“Wait for the bugle, Bumpy.” The walks will be thick with vics. We hope to hide our contraband among them. But he is a big parcel.

“Le’s go.” He drags at us and laughs. His head is wet and dust is on his putty-gray face. “C’mon, le’s go.”

“Wait for the bugle. Come on over behind the shed.”

“Le’s go. Maybe I’ll get another bottle. ’T’s easy. Madame’s too dumb to see us.” The hospital guard known as Madam is the most stupid

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of the lot. “Want-a thank The Doc an’ Madame.

Thank Madame, too.”

“We can’t start ’til the bugle blows, Bumpy.”

“I’ll blow my own bugle. It’ll be for Madame.” He tries to lift a foot and almost falls.

Thin and fine in the still, hot air the voice of the prison bugle sings across the yard. “My bugle’s

better'n that. Lis'n to it." Again Bumpy tries and again he almost spreads his bulk on the pile of bricks.

"Come on, now, Bumpy. And listen, keep still or we'll all be in isolation."

"Sure, keep still. But I got-a thank The Doc."

We surround him and start. We are rough with him. One shoves him from the rear, one walks ahead to keep him in bounds, and two walk at his elbows, leading him. He careens and pitches, but we keep him upright.

"Keep still, now, Bumpy."

"Sure." We walk thirty yards, then Bumpy stops. "Where's-a-bottle?"

"It's empty, Bumpy. You don't want the bottle. It's empty."

We start again. Bumpy tries to sing. Harbrow places a hand over the big mouth. The

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theory is wrong, for Bumpy roars. "Take your hand away!"

"Well, keep still, then."

"Want-a sing. Sing about The Doc. Good guy. Gives you salts an' whisky."

"Don't sing. You'll have a screw on you." He tumbles along quietly with us.

As we approach the hospital, Moore begins talking rapidly and we all laugh and shove Bumpy and one another. Bumpy tries to hold his head still and listen to Moore. We pass the hospital. The press of men is thick on the walks to the cell-house doors. "Got-a thank The

Doc,” Bumpy shouts as we go through the door. He lunges backward and almost breaks away.

Harbrow is angry. “Sch-h-h, you fat fool. Think we brought you all the way up here so’s you could get us flung in the hole! Keep your trap shut and come on to your cell. And keep it shut after you get in.”

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We make elaborate conversation as we pass the guards inside the door. They scan us. “Let’s take him down to the south stairs,” Moore suggests.

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A loose-jawed vic notes Bumpy and shouts, “Jes’, where the hell’d you get it?”

Moore steps over and lifts a fist. “Shut your trap or you’ll get something, too.” The vic leaps into his cell.

Only one of us makes his home on Bumpy’s gallery, but we all go to his cell with him.

“All in!” a screw calls. “All in for count!”

“Get in, Bumpy, and shut up. Don’t go down for supper. We’ll sneak you up something. Mind, now, don’t go down. And if the screw comes along, keep still.”

We leave him. The guard starts the count.

We hope Bumpy will stay quiet. He wrecks it. “Hoo-ray for The Doc!” he howls. “Gives you salts an’ whisky... hoo-ray-ee!” The guard halts the count and goes to search out the offender.

“I hope them screws don’t remember we brought him in,” says Moore.

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X '17'

S UNLIGHT is wash-gold over the brick streets as we go out to work. Thin wisps of gilded fire flow up from the roof ridges of all the buildings as we face east. The night's dews are drifting off into the morning. Just above the wall struts the sun.

In their new summer uniforms the guards look important in the fresh day. Rock Gang Slim twirls his club swankily as he steps about the head of the line after count, waiting for The Bear to arrive. "Keep quiet, men," he orders pleasantly. His mood is as brave as the day and he smiles at us. He seems to wish to talk with us.

The Bear also is alert and springing as he comes down the stair from the mess hall. His razor-polished chin is at the ultimate up, and baseless majesty looks over the blue collar at the pent, forming their rectangles of misery in the

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sun. Satisfaction with his person, his mind and his status is in the cock of his big head. He swings out down the rock gang line and returns surveying the vics who make bricks, speaking mostly to himself but so informing his subordinates that he is pleased with their manner of handling their charges. "Right. All right here," the sprag voice approves. "A little more quiet here, gentlemen; just a little more, please." He smirks and waggles a playfully admonitory finger. "Right."

Rock Gang slashes his club saber-wise through the bright air. "Forward!" he snaps briskly. 'A bad morning for a lam, this. These screws are all so chipper they would break out guns and make them crack after a running vic for the fun of it. "Step it out, men," Slim calls. "You, 17, hit into it and keep that rank straight." The vic 17 looks more thin and weary than usual this morning, as if he had spent his night with ghosts.

We are off the bricks and halfway across the cindered yard to the rock shed when disorder claws the rear of the line out of formation. "Grab him!" a vic shouts. "Hold him!" another.

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Rock Gang goes into action. He orders his second to the head of the line with a gesture and cries, "Halt!" He speeds back to the end of the line, whence he had walked to the middle before the line broke. Already the long file has lost its edges in a tendency toward curves. Soon we are a press about Rock Gang and the cause of the disturbance. Tennessee, the second, is shouting at us to remake the line, but is wasting energy.

"Did someone hit this man?" Rock Gang questions, turning from the bleeding vic to the men nearest. Detached guards off the night trick have come up and are hammering each a path to the center. Gun-guards from the corner towers run down the east wall to be nearer if they are needed. They show flat and black against the sun. One elevates his head like a hound

baying and shouts something. The wind takes his words off behind him over the wall.

“Nobody hit him, Slim,” a big man offers. “That guy’s a lunger. He’s havin’ a hemorrhage. His guts is busted-see.”

“Sounds fishy to me,” Slim tells us.

Two men prop 17 between them. His blue-and-white

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face looks green in the sun and the blood over his chin is scarlet. His head bobbles on his thin neck and frightful rattlings come out of him.

“Let a couple of us take him over to the annex, Slim,” the big vic suggests. “He’s stayed clear of the place because he didn’t think he was sick-see. But it’s time he was in there now.”

Rock Gang is unconvinced. He is new with us and does not yet know the liars from the others. Tennessee has told us, though, that he likes us because of the name we have wrought for him. He looks at 17. “What’s the matter ;with you?” he demands, stepping closer to the afflicted man. “Did someone do somethin’ to you?”

The consumptive lifts his head half to erect and tries to speak. But he can only gurgle and his head will not hold. When it flops down it goes lower than it was before and a light spatter of blood decorates the front of his uniform. His eyes are closing as the glim behind them weakens.

Slim turns to another guard. “How’s it look to you?” He is afraid, as are all the guards, to

make an incorrect report to The Bear. The best he would receive would be The Bear's gashing tongue, and the worst would be dismissal. "How's it look, hunh?"

"I guess he's sick," the questioned answers. "He looks it, anyway. Take him on with a couple of the lads and I'll stay here with Tennessee and the gang."

"All right, you and you," Rock Gang orders, nodding to the men who are holding 17, "hang onto him and we'll take him up to the annex. He should 'a' been in there all the time. That doctor's crazy for bein' so easy with you people." He looks about at us angrily. His mood is dark now for the day, and resentment flows from him easily.

"Line up here, men!" the deputy incumbent of Rock Gang's post shouts. "Come on; you'd think you was havin' a picnic."

"Aw, dry up!" a vic snarls.

"All right, maybe I will an' maybe I won't; but come on an' line up."

We start to obey and have made half a line when another agitation breaks up the rear ranks. "Well, hang onto him," one of 17's supporters

snaps at the other. We mill again. 17 is in an orgasm of action that tells a near end. Convulsions gripe him. He lifts his feet from the ground and gyrates them in the air. This with the twisting of his arms and torso almost drags down the men who hold him. "Fasten onto him, men; hang on!" Rock Gang shouts, making a careful

effort to seize the flailing feet. He is concerned for his new uniform. The sick man's mouth is open wide and his breath comes clotted, in long waves of effort, "a-a-a-ah... ha-a-a-ah."

Slim attaches himself to one foot, finally, and almost has the other when 17's body stiffens and moves suddenly in swift vibrato. The men who support him look sharply into his face, trying to understand. Then his body snaps into slackness like a cut hawser and his head falls backward.

Rock Gang Slim looks like a frightened child. The two men who hold 17 lay him down on the cinders. "Yeh, lay him down," says Rock Gang, going down on one knee and then looking up at the twist of faces about him as if he never had seen any of them before. He looks at 17. He

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pulls open the gray coat and the striped shirt from 17's broken chest and shoves his hand under the bull-wool undershirt. Closer he bends and turns his head in an attitude of listening. Then he lifts again his face, which still has its frightened child look.

"This man's dead," he tells us. His voice sounds as if it has sand in it. "Sure, he's dead,"... as in answer to one who questioned his verdict. He stands up. "I said that doctor was crazy... Now you men go on to work. Take 'em on, Tennessee. We'll get this out of here." He nods down at 17.

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We hurry into line. The warmth has gone out of the day. The stumble of the rock hammers in the hollow

troughs will cover something over. As we glance back at the body bunched at the guards' feet it looks no larger than the body of a baby in the wide sunlight.

XI ON REPORT

WE are on trial again. The difference is that one man is judge and jury and we may take no appeal from his findings... Unless we desire comedy and a heavier sentence.

Each elaborate formula-social, juridical, sexual, economic-that we and our forefathers have created has operated to bring us here. And just there at the outside of the walls the force of each dies. When we entered here we entered into a state whose ordinances and enforcements are like no others we ever have known. In this state it is presumed we shall go so far into longing for the state we have left that when we return to it we shall have it as our sole and sufficing purpose ever to bend the thin neck of obedience to all the established precepts we hurdled in an earlier day.

Here in this office we shall meet one of five

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ends: a warning, loss of buying privileges, loss of recreation privileges, temporary isolation, permanent isolation. The procedure is simple. If our sentence is to be death we shall be tried elsewhere.

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Through the door from the yard a screw hustles a thick-bodied Greek from the tailor shop. "You didn't see me do something," chatters the Greek. "You blind. You didn't see me. Somebody... another man do it."

The guard looks at his prisoner. What other man? That is just what I want to find out. You tell me that and I'll take you back to the shop."

"I don't tell you. I want a knife in me? I don't. So I don't tell you. You didn't see me do something."

"Shut up or the Old Man'll make it harder for you."

The Greek turns defeated eyes to one and another of us sitting about the office on the low benches. His eyes ask comprehension, aid.

"That's right, bo, don't ever be a stool pigeon," a little vic with narrow eyes and an ape's jaw

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approves. "There's enough of 'em in this dump already." His look dares the guard to disagree. "They run the dump. Somebody prob'ly stooled on you or that bird there wouldn't have you down here."

"I seen him myself," the screw says.

"You just said you wanted to know about the other man, didn't you?"

The Greek beats his mind to the work of trying to understand the passage between the other vic and the guard. "No, you didn't see me do something." His arms go up in a gesture to assist his words.

"Where'd you fall from — the army?" the little vic asks him.

"Sure. I fight like hell. So here I am."

The Negro beside the little vic laughs in his belly and then lifts the laugh into his throat and makes it audible. "You think hit makes any never mind what you done in the ahmy? You ain't in no ahmy now.

Wah's ovah. Lot o' mo' good sojers in this man's place."

"Sure, I fight in the army," agrees the Greek. "I got a bullet in me."

"So'd I," the Negro laughs. "Not in no ahmy,

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neithah. Hit was mah own wah." He orders the laugh back into his belly and rolls his head and his eyes over his memories. "'Tain't why fo' the law git me, though."

The little vic will not move his eyes from the guard's. His face is shut up on a ruby wish. He sits with tight fists clenched between his knees and as he looks at the guard his eyes seem to go closer to each other. "Lice!" he spits.

"You call me a louse and I'll rap you to the Old Man again before you get out of this office," the screw promises.

"I don't have to call you a louse, ho. You know all about it already. An' if you want to make another rap, make it!" His wish comes nearer to action, and to underscore it he half rises from the bench.

"All right, I will."

"Sure you will. That's what you're here for."

The screw carries in his hand a report on the Greek. When the convict clerk enters the screw turns in the report and withdraws.

"Wait and make that rap, louse," the little vic calls after him. The screw closes the door.

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“When the Old Man comin’?” the Negro asks the clerk.

“You in a hurry?” the clerk replies. He has a wily face lit by small, brilliant blue eyes.

“Pretty tough, are you?” the little vic shoots at him. “Lookin’ for somebody more to stool on?” He is so clamped within himself that he is in pain and desires the release of combat.

“Better watch your step,” advises the clerk blackly.

“And you better watch yours, bo. You ain’t outside yet. They take better men than you out feet first. You’re the rat stooled on old man Kennedy. You got an old man put in isolation so you could get closer to a parole.”

“You know everything, don’t you?” the clerk queries weakly. He feels the thrust of every reported convict’s eyes and his nerves shake.

A guard follows two more men through the door from the yard. One is a tall, heavily handsome blond man in his thirties and the other a wan, simpering blond boy of about twenty. The guard passes a report to the clerk, who reads it and grins nauseous knowledge at the newcomers. “Better not try to fake out of it,” the

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screw tells the big man. “You’ll hang onto yourself a little better next time... if the Old Man don’t give you permanent so you won’t have to.” The convict scowls and wheels about to place his back toward the guard. The clerk still looks at the pair and grins.

“He don’t see me do something,” the Greek explains to the big vic. “Maybe he don’t see you do something, too.”

“Go to hell and shut your pan or I’ll bang you,” the vic growls. He stands close to the boy and talks to him with words stopped so low we cannot hear them. He slides a palm up and down the inside of one of the boy’s arms from wrist to pit as he talks.

The deputy comes in from the yard. On his heels is a guard, who assumes a stance at the right of the yard door. The deputy walks around behind his desk and sits.

Instantly the little vic is before the desk. “Lis’en here, warden, can’t a man do his time in here without some bastard always stoolin’ on him and givin’ him bum raps?”

The deputy’s face is as innocent of emotional signs as is the sleek, bright surface of a block

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of ice. “Go over there and sit down,” he orders the vic.

“God damn it, warden, I’ll kill that rat if...”

“Go over there and sit down.” No anger shows in the deputy’s eyes.

“I’ll go and sit down when you tell me if I have to stand for any more o’ this stoolin’. I’m doin’ my time, and I want to be left alone.”

“Take this man,”... the deputy shifts his eyes to the guard... “and place him in isolation. And leave him alone. Will that please you better?” he asks the vic.

The little man is still trying to weld his hate and his words into a blighting outpour when the guard walks

him through the door behind the deputy's desk. We hear his voice once in a thin scream. In three minutes the guard is back. The clerk grins.

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"Who's 12601?" asks the deputy. His face has not altered in the minutest detail of composure or color.

"Me," answers the Negro, rising. He twiddles

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his cap and slaps his feet on the floor, like a horse knocking flies off its hocks.

"This report says you were carrying food to your cell from the mess hall," the deputy reads. He keeps his eyes on the report and waits an answer. His hands are long and pale. They hold the report without a tremor.

"This report says you were carrying food to your cell from the mess hall." The silence makes us itch. We squirm.

"I had a piddlin' little ole piece o' bread."

"Don't you get enough to eat here?"

"Inside that ole cell eve'y night I get hongry."

"You lose your buying and yard privileges for six weeks. Go down to the clothes room and get some red numbers sewn onto your clothes."

The Negro turns and goes to the door with his head hanging. He closes the door after him with eloquent care.

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Singly and in duos and trios other offenders are brought in. Their spirits grade from the slump of fear to the upspringing of unreckoning defiance. Some

already wear red or yellow numbers supplementary to the black numbers that

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are duplicated after their names on the prison records. Some wear numbers that mark them as recent arrivals. An old man in a trio is distinguished by one of the lowest serial numbers in the prison. Apathy is on him and in him. He has lived too long to care.

Our case is called and disposed of quickly, with a warning. As we step toward the door the deputy speaks

“You are charged with misbehaving with this boy behind the...”

We close the door softly.

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XII

TENSE ROPE AT DAYBREAK

SOMEWHERE in the black of the night we wake. Depression is over all the prison, battened tight. No wind is in the yard, where the arc lamps stare like mummied eyes. In the cell-block is the shadow of a murmur, as if thought has become vocal unaided by tongues. We turn carefully in our bunks and bend our necks backward that we may look through the windows. Dawn is still below the edge of night, but the lights on the cell-house wall, twenty-five feet from us, burn low, seeming to foreknow the end of their watching. Next door to us on the north The Strutter is awake. He moans and we can hear him rub his fingers against his scalp.

Hammers rattle against wood down the yard to the south. It has begun, then. We crane against the bars and can see an edge of the puddle

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of light the construction bullseye electrics make down inside the isolation yard. We have not believed it, have hoped that something, some one, would order the officials to keep their rope in its locker, coiled, slack.

“The filthy sons o’ bitches!” The Strutter curses. He says it with the feeling that only he can command who seldom is profane.

The murmur in the cell-house swells, yet it remains a murmur. The hammers talk death to the wood in the puddle of light inside the isolation walls. A dropped

board makes a hollow rattle that banks in diminuendo across the yard between the higher main walls with the sound of wooden balls rolled swiftly.

Again The Strutter curses. “What the hell’s the matter with you?” the vic in the next cell north of him whispers loudly. We wait for the answer. Before it comes the hammers clatter a long passage.

“It ain’t the law,” The Strutter explains finally. He has abandoned his whisper for an easier way of speech. “It’s the vics that’ll go down there and build a scaffold for a better man than they are.” His words are acrid, boiling up

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from the deepest, blackest well in him. “I ain’t sayin’ if Mug is right or wrong. But I know sure as hell them vics makin’ that noise down there are wrong.”

We hear the lisp of the night screw’s muffled shoe soles. He walks the ground floor from south to north, keeping far out against the wall. His head is slumped into his chest. Although he can hear us he does not look up. The hammers talk to the wood down the yard, each at a different pitch.

“They didn’t start ‘til after midnight,” says The Strutter, “so’s we wouldn’t hear them hammers. They think we wouldn’t.”

Mug is in a cell in isolation, maybe twenty feet from the hammers, maybe fewer than twenty. Everything the hammers tell the wood Mug hears. He has waited half a year for the midnight when the hammers would begin. We have hoped, for him, for ourselves.

“What made ‘em think we wouldn’t hear ‘em?” The Strutter’s neighbor asks, bewildered.

“Aw, I don’t know,” The Strutter replies. His voice tells plainly that he has no wish for speech. But he continues. “It wasn’t them

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hammers woke us up. It was somethin’ else.”

“What else?”

“I don’t know. But it wasn’t them hammers. I can’t say it like I think it.”

As the hammers go on we clutch the bars and bow our spines back again to see the light over the isolation pen. It has weakened, for day is coming up faintly like far, thin smoke. Electrics in the isolation pen have made masked theatrical figures of the scaffold-riggers from midnight until now. The riggers have worked at a new job and likely have had some interest in it. Can they look at one another now in the light of the day?

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We go to breakfast wearing taut, white faces. We are a community of more than two thousand men. Among so many should be many tones of spirit. This morning, though, we all have sullenness sitting down with us. In protest against the feeling compelled in us we scrape our feet loudly, drag over our meal and search boldly into the faces of the guards. The deputy warden comes in and scans us. His face with its thin, bleak nose curving sharply is a talon

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threatening us against outbreak. He gives us to know we shall be torn if we send our desire ahead into

action.

After breakfast and throughout the day we move slowly. We are studiously at fault in our work and curse more freely than we labor. Late in the afternoon the officials flurry with fear and detail gun-guards to the walls to patrol between the towers, two guards to a wall, and order into the open the machine gat from the tower on the short wall at the gate to the recreation yard. They wish to make us know again that we are in keep, mastered.

We scuffle along slowly still as we go to our cells after the last meal. Music night in B cellhouse is Tuesday. To-night, Wednesday, we have a band. The regular combination opens over in C house before our hastily organized outfit begins. The night screw talks to the drummer, and when he leaves, the drummer talks to the eight other vics. The fiddle raps with his bow and the racket spurts through the house. Music is not in the boys to-night. The clarinet goes wild on tempo, the saxes fake more than half of everything played and the whole outfit

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smears its segues and flounders in the opening phrase of each follow.

“Take ‘em to hell out of here!” a vic screeches from an upper gallery. The musicians are shredding *Alabama Bound*. “Take ‘em to hell out of here! Let ‘em go down and play for the carpenters at isolation!” The screw walks out to the wall and peers at the top of the block. “How do we look?” someone asks him. The musicians start a repeat chorus. The screw turns to

them and makes motions downward with flattened hands. They dim the noise and then stop. The screw speaks to the drummer, the drummer speaks to the others, and they fold their chairs and leave.

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After taps The Strutter says, “I wish I had somethin’ to dope me to sleep ‘til breakfast.”

A vic on the gallery above hears and answers, “Mug’s got the dope.”

Voices drone low all over the cell-block. The screw trots the galleries, issuing warnings and threats. He is powerless.

We are awake at midnight. The hammers speak again and the arc lamps watch. Floodlights

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at the bases of the wall towers add their flare for an hour. Then the hammers fall quiet and the floods are snapped off. Silence drops over the yard like the cover on a hatch.

“Now they’re all set,” says The Strutter.

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We lie open-eyed in our bunks. Thought drains out of us and numbness comes in its stead. Last night we woke murmuring. To-night we cannot even murmur. The voice of the cellblock is dead and our minds are empty. All that remains of sentience is the vague notion of its defection.

Time seeps away in little drops into the deep black sands of the night. We strain in our bunks until we can almost hear the drops fall. At length a glimmer of dawn shows us the upright streaks that are the bars at

the cell-house windows. The light on the bars will tell us when day is full enough.

“Can you see anything... or hear anything?” a vic above us on the next gallery questions. His voice is cautious, lest it muffle any sound that may come from the yard. Silence answers him.

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We watch the bars at the windows. They are black. Then between two seconds they are not. Over the black is a light-filament of rose. The sun has come up.

For half an hour we lie listening-to nothing. When will it be?

“Jesus Christ, he’s gone... Mug’s gone already!” is the suddenly shrieked answer. Far down the cell-block one vic heard first what we all B.ear now, hammers at work on wood. Already the scaffold is coming down. The hammers make a hurried noise as the timbers fall.

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XIII

LATE MARCH

ALL day the damp wind has hustled gravid, steel-colored clouds about the sky. It has worked through to our bones and is casing them with chill. When the order comes to down tools for the day we are almost too indifferent to stop. The work is futile, but when we do it the mind is more quiet. The cells will be sweating cold when we go in. We are not eager to go. Better to keep the hands moving here.

While we line up the cloud jam breaks and the rupture is stained saffron along the edges. Each man looks up. We had forgotten the sun. Each looks up, awed and curious, silent.

“Straight acrost, now, so’s I kin count ye,” the Irish guard commands. His eyes are shaped like a pig’s and he squints against the new-come brightness. “I said straight acrost; mind, now,” he orders the eighth rank. He always counts

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three times, twice for certainty and the third time, as he explains to his second, “Because ye can’t never tell.”

Ahead the brick cell-houses are dripping bloody light. The bricks in the streets flame and the copper roof of the tuberculosis annex is more sensed than seen.

“All right, now — forward.” The guard flourishes his club and the line moves. We scatter the cinders with the sound of rain.

As we near the buildings a roistering birdnote breaks out above the shuffle of our feet. The cell-houses make sharp angles with one another and sounds multiply with echo between them. We look about, into the two naked small trees beside the hospital, at the roofs, behind us. As the head of the line turns onto the walk before the mess hall someone calls:

“There he is — look! On the chimney — look!”

It is there, a robin, breast up full toward the burning west, head back, in full song. Four after four the men in the long line make the turning and the line joins others on the wide walk.

“Givin’ ‘er hell, ain’t ‘e. Ain’t ‘e, though!”

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“He’ll bust wide open if he keeps that up.”

“Je—sus Christ Al—might—ee, a robin! Look, Marty. Yu know, I seen that little bed o’ toolups startin’ up over by the hospital this mornin’. Now here’s this fellow.”

“Well, it’s just a bird, ain’t it? What about it?”

The song goes on, notes tumbling in a thin torrent between the cell-house walls. One moment the bird is a diminutive blaze on the chimney-edge. The next it is a figurine in old bronze. The lines of faces swing with one movement to the west. The clouds have closed together.

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As we on B gallery go to our cells, one man does a running jig. His term expires in two weeks.

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“YOU’RE AWAY FROM ALL THAT
NOW”

*He walked up and down the street,
'Til the shoes fell off his feet...*

I

“YOU’RE AWAY FROM ALL THAT NOW”

YOU’RE away from all that now, as far as ever you can go, and no one here knows where, ever, you may have been, nor why you may have been there. Here in the city-room you are a utile piece of the machinery that makes newspapers, and that ever you were in the junkstack, none knows here, not even the cutie at the next desk — to whom you have told so much.

Here the Old Man rates you on how you give, on how well you help him hold his job. In the clacking round of the day here you are a bolt in the works, and with the girl at the next desk you are the boy with the big blue eyes. The Old Man takes his belt of gin at the end of the day and ducks, and if he gives you a think before he hangs his hat up here again it is only to think it will be jake if you show for the next trick, so he will not have to sort over another batch of ambulant meat to find your like.

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He threatens often enough to put you permanently on the pavement. The sister at the next desk hopes he does. Then she can telephone to you to say how sorry she is, to invite you over. She will pillow your head between her breasts and be certain she is having carnival. She loves a weakling, a failure. She’s not

married to one, yet. She'll make it, though. She's dumb enough for it.

You're away, but you're a man who suffers jumps. Every time you see a dick, you jump something in you jumps. You thought that would wear away in time and leave no scars. You know more now than you knew when first you thought that. Every time another of this city-room tribe cracks anything about crook or jail or bighouse, that something jumps. And if you're that way, what of the laddies who do the longer stretches, the boys who come out and rove about with murders and forgeries and other capers peeping at them from around corners? It's the stretches they haven't done but still rate that bother them.

• • • • •

Well, come on out on the street and chase

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yourself some news. The people you'll see will not see you-not your self. That's what skin and meat are for, to cover over selves. One of those bums in the bighouse said the dump puts something on you that'll never come off. He was right as iron rivets, that vic. But never mind — no one out here will see it. You know it's there, but you may be smart enough to keep it stashed until the worms get you.

You could have made it easier for yourself, though. Or maybe you couldn't. Before you came out you promised yourself you would get into the mountains somewhere and sponge up sunshine and clean air until you had forgotten rats, and what happened to Joe, and nauseas, drooling men and festering women and death

on the steel plates. You forgot two items — your personal twittering nerves, and human existence. You were going to be smart, and you got yourself married. Wisdom was yours, and now you're a father. Regret? Why regret? Yesterday and regret are equally valuable. You did what you did, and even whether she's a good woman does not count, for what is a good woman?

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The streets twitch with people, and the people are of about the same weight to you that you are to them. Life stinks right along anyway. You can look at these faces going past until you are old like Old Original the three-legged and you'll know in the end no more about what's behind them than you now know. And the same to them.

You're one up, there. They don't know when they see you in your trick front that you've lain half naked, suffocating, and louse-bitten a string of your years while they have been batting around for the price of bread and a peep at the circus. They've never seen their bankers cankering with fear in a sewer and unwittingly making ready for death. You'll prowl a long time among them before you find one who hasn't missed the sweet of checking off the seconds until a hanged man kicks his last kick in the sunshine. What was it that bird said yesterday? —“I'm in trouble: My wife's leaving me.” And he cried. Mug didn't say, “I'm in trouble: My life's leaving me.” Not Mug. And he didn't cry.

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But if only the nights would go easier. It seems they ought to, now, but they don't. Some of them are longer than they were when you were in your coop. Sometime you lie awake and wait for the rats and sometime you wait for the gang to snore and grunt, and nothing comes of it. Or if anything does, it is only that the baby wakes and wails and you try to come up out of your hop and make legible aces and spades of your existence.

The worst nights come after the Old Man has had you on police for a time, the nights after the days when you have been down to the jailhouse and seen a shine looking out at one window and a redheaded mamma looking out at another, and the boys in the bull-pen doing their 'round-and-'round for exercise. Or after you have been sent to inquire what are the parting expletives of someone who has grabbed himself a long jolt in stir, when the boys in the cells are whining Boston Burglar. There's a ditty!—

*Going off to the pen-i-ten-tiaree, poor boy,
Going off to the pen-i-ten-tiaree...*

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The hell of it is, you can't swing a pick ever again, so you will have to keep this job or one like it. The jailhouse and stir fixed all that for you. Your stomach would not handle the kind of chuck a pick-swingers must eat, and your back would break anyway. Also you would die in an office if you had to do your full daily there, slung to a desk. So the nights will go on as they are — tangled with what you would sooner

forget. It's a rub, though, for from your newest cell-block — your apartment house — the porch railings against a street lamp can look enough like a view through a bighouse window to punish a steadier man than you.

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"I'm on the street," the bright reporter yammers. He's on the street. That means something to him, but not what it means to a man who, the like of you, has made the hoosegow. You're on the street also, and more so. You've been sprung, and now you're on the street. All you have to do now is stay that way.

If your trying to stay on the street doesn't put your daughter's mother in the grave, everything will be slick — slick as the hide of the broad

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at the next desk, back there in the mill. Your daughter's mother worries about the whole conviction mess, and what can you do about it? She's afraid someone will learn what your record is and break you loose from your job.

Women have more weirdnesses than men anyway, by all that can be seen. Ever since she has known about the bat they gave you she asks questions. "How high was the wall — high as that one?" Now that's a hell of a thing to care to know. And she asks, "Was the food always so bad?" What can you do about it? You know plenty of answers, but they're all of them wrong. And of the lot, the wrongest is no answer at all.

You want to tell her you'd rather she keep away from the popular when she's at the piano, because you

remember the tin band that played the night before Mug shoved off. If you do, though, you'll have to tell more. She has enough irritations without that. So the line is passed back to you. Hold it tightly.

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Sho enough, son, hoodoos are going to keep after you until Brother Time heaves the black

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bag over your head, you may as well allow. You can run from them or hide out or build whatever other attitudes of pretense seem likeliest for service, yet they will be with you where and how ever you go. You cannot watch insanities blossom in front of your eyes that long and then forget them. Their colors will keep on with you until you croak. So will the shapes of the bricks and the looks of all the screws you've known, the blended odors of night swinging in dead air behind stone, and the remembered itch for a woman.

You're going to have hoodoos with you — and from now on. Well, whistle at them. The people who hear you will believe you are whistling because you are happy. Or sing at them. Sing them the one that almost kicked the cripple off his dot—

“Sundown — let tomorrow come...”

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A GLOSSARY

Belly of a drag— The under side of a freight train; the *rods*.

Bighouse— A state or federal penitentiary. The term never is used to designate a penal institution operated by a unit smaller than a state.

Blast— To shoot.

Blind— The front, or *blind*, end of the baggage car on a passenger train; the *blind baggage*. By extension, the connecting sections of any two cars in such a train.

Blow (snow)— To use cocaine by inhaling it as powder through the nose.

Book, the— Life imprisonment.

Bull-wool— Shoddy.

Can— A jail.

Cans— The tramps' *jungle*, or meeting, cooking, loafing and, sometime, drinking place.

Cannon— A pickpocket. It is presumed by some searchers into slang origins that the word evolved from the Yiddish *gonov*, meaning thief, which later became *gon*, and then *gun*. In the argot, *cannon*, *rod*, *gun*, *gat*, *heater* and *torch* are all used to designate a revolver or pistol. *Cannon*, however, is the only word of the group that is used synonymously with *gun* as a derivative from *gonov*.

Caper— Almost any such offense as a burglary, a holdup, a forgery, an embezzlement, a murder, etc.

Cheaters— Spectacles.

Clackers— Dollars.

Clown— A policeman; specifically, a small— town policeman.

Cop a plea— To plead guilty with a view to winning lenience.

Drag— A freight train, from its slowness as compared with the speed of a passenger train. *Dick*— A detective.

Ducket— A ticket.

Fall— To be arrested. Conviction is usually implied in addition.

Fall-money— Money that a crook places in a bank for use as bail money in the event of his arrest. He may prefer its forfeiture to his standing trial.

Fin— A five-dollar bill.

Frisk— To search. A detective *frisks* his arrested suspect; a thief *frisks* a freight train, a house or his human victim.

Front— Inclusively, clothing; one's sartorial effect.

Gat— A revolver or pistol.

Glom— To take; to steal; to catch hold of.

Go by hand— To walk.

Gunsel— A passive male homosexual, usually a boy or youth.

Gut— Bologna, or any sausage. To *make a gut plunge on butch* is to beg meat of any kind from a meat-market proprietor.

Heater— A revolver or pistol.

Hitch— A term in jail or a penitentiary. It interchanges with *bit* and *stretch*.

Hocks, on the— Standing up.

Hole— An isolation cell, usually unlighted.

Hook— A pickpocket.

Hop; hophead— A drug addict; originally a morphine addict; now any user of drugs.

Jailhouse— A city or county jail. The term never is used to designate a penitentiary. A workhouse usually is referred to as a *bridewell*; a poorhouse as a *pogey*; an insane asylum as a *bughouse* or *bathouse*.

Kicks— Shoes.

Lam— To run. A *lam* is a dash for freedom.

Mob— A gang of pickpockets who work in concert.

Mouthpiece— A lawyer.

Mug— A detective.

Mule— Raw alcohol.

Negotiables— Any negotiable securities, in which some crooks specialize.

Oregon boot— A heavy, steel, boot— like manacle that is worn on the foot and prevents running.

Pling— To beg on a street; to *panhandle*.

Punk— Identical with *gungel*.

Put the B on— To beg.

Rap— At law, a charge; in a jail or a penitentiary, an information. To *make a bum rap* is to make a false report.

Rotary— A few jails in the United States still have a cellblock in the form of a drum containing two tiers of cells. The cells are shaped like the cuts of a pie. The drum revolves inside a circle of flat

steel bars. Because the drum is built away from the outer walls of a jail and because it perpetually revolves, the cells, in it are more than usually dark. In at least one jail of the few containing a rotary block the rotary does not revolve excepting when it is revolved manually to bring the mouth of a cell opposite the door to permit a prisoner to go through it into or out of his cell.

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Rumble— An inquiry, from a policeman or a detective, of what one is about. *Rummy*— Nervously disorganized from drink or drugs.

Screw— A guard, either in a jail or a penitentiary.

Set over— To kill.

Shove across— To kill.

Slum— Meat-and-vegetable stew; any food.

Snow— Cocaine; sometimes also used to designate heroin.

Stashed— Hidden. *To stash is to hide*.

Stagged— Cut off short at the bottoms of the legs, so that there are no cuffs.

Stem— The main street of a community.

Sticks— Identical with *cans*.

Stir— A penitentiary. The term is never used to designate a jail.

Tommy— A girl. Some heavier name usually is used to distinguish the prostitute from the girl who merely takes a lover, for love.

Tumble— To be arrested. *To fall*. Usually the term is so used that not arrest alone, but also conviction on a charge is implied.

Vic— The convict's name for a convict.

Whiteline— Raw alcohol; *mule*.

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Wires— A telegraph line.

Wobbly— A member of the Industrial Workers of the World; an I.W.W.

Wolf— An active male homosexual.

THE END

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A Critique

Albert J. Barr's *Let Tomorrow Come*, which did not appear until the last year of the decade, is a novel only in the widest sense, being more precisely a loosely related series of impressionistic sketches, often horrifying in content but compassionate in tone, of life in, first, a jail and then a "Bighouse," or penitentiary. Although the inmates and the unnatural pressures on them are seen through the eyes of a "federal" prisoner — apparently the activist writer had been an I.W.W. (*The Industrial Workers of the World*, aka "Wobblies") member — the viewpoint is curiously apolitical. For all his sensitiveness the author reveals the nightmare passivity of one who can observe but no longer act, whether he describes in his oblique, imagistic prose a prisoner so crazed at the approach of each long night that he can only moan constantly, "Sundown — let tomorrow come," or a banker so overwhelmed by shame at his conviction for embezzlement that both body and personality slowly collapse into shapelessness, or a young social rebel who harangues his cellmates as though from a corner soapbox until an uncomprehending tough knocks him down with a blow on the mouth. The short concluding section of the book gives the clue to this passivity. An interior monologue subtitled, "You're Away from All That Now," this section indicates that the author has been released and has found employment as a newspaperman. He has only two wants now — to keep his job and to remember as little as possible of prison

experience. The book, then, is an act of psychological catharsis, an attempt to exorcise even his bad dreams; and in sweeping away the past he has swept away also any desire toward that radicalism which brought upon him the personality-crippling imprisonment.

Walter B. Rideout

The Radical Novel in the United States: 1900-1954

